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Rabbits in the Fields of Strangers

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Prologue:

Rue de Nemours, 2002

The walls of the apartment at 3 rue de Nemours are silent now. They used to talk to me. I would come back here every year. On earlier trips I heard words and sounds. Perhaps it's because my brother died here last year and there's no one here to listen. He was the last of my line. There is no one else in that apartment who can hear the past. I have been away for such a long time. Once there was a happy family living between these now silent walls.

I spent my young life in this apartment, from 1933 to 1942. I was happy here until a black cloud arrived and engulfed us, obliterating our normal life and I had to flee for my survival.

That summer of 1942, anti-Semitism was rising. None of the adults wanted to believe it, especially my father, who thought people were essentially good. Our family talked about it at the dinner table. All arguments ceased when the yellow stars were introduced.

I remember the first day I had to wear the yellow star. My mother had to sew it on my outdoor jacket. Then she sews one on my father's jacket, my brother's jacket, and then her own jacket. I still see her, sitting on a chair, hunched over the short summer coats, pulling the needle in and out with trembling fingers. Her face was white and mask-like, mouth pinched. She did not say a word. When she finished, we dressed. I thought it was all a game. We were all wearing the same yellow star with the word "Jew" written in bold black letters.

My mother accompanied me to school. Sitting in my classroom, I saw two or three

schoolmates wearing the same star. We looked at each other shyly. During recess, we gravitated towards each other and stayed in a cluster. We made small talk. We could not understand the meaning of the star and why we had to wear it.

During class our teacher tried to explain. She said it was a new law in France. It did not mean that we were different; it was just a way to identify who was who. I do not remember if the other children made fun of us or ignored us.

The parents paid more attention that day when they picked up their daughters. One parent pulled her child away. She was kissing another child, as little girls do, who was wearing the star.

It was very disturbing. The next day the division between the girls was more obvious: “My parents told me not to talk to you,” one said to me. I wonder what had changed since yesterday. I was still the same. Did I have something wrong with me? Why did one of my best friends suddenly ignore me?

The next day, the owner of the building we were living in, Monsieur Triquet and his son Jacques, who was ten years old, came to our door. He said to my mother, “I am ashamed as a free man of this indignity. I will wear your star and so will my son. Lend me your husband's jacket. My son will wear your son's coat and we will both take Greta to school.” So they walked with me to school, two gentile friends, wearing a borrowed star.

I was just happy to be strolling with Jacques. I liked him a lot. He was tall; he had black hair, blue eyes and a radiant smile. He was very affectionate and we played together in the backyard: games, dominoes, jump rope. Sitting side by side with him on the stoop, he would read me stories. I realize now that they were both courageous and risked their lives to show us

solidarity. They were honorable people. They understood how we felt and showed us that not everyone in Paris and our neighborhood was indifferent or cruel.

Did I wonder as a child why people in the streets were crossing over in order to get away from us? Were we suddenly malodorous beings? Did we carry a contagious disease?

Why had I suddenly become a pariah? A tiny girl with blond hair, wearing a yellow star on her small chest, with the word “Jew” emblazoned in black letters. Such a bright yellow shining on her lapel, a sun darkened with specks of black.

I have mixed feelings to this day when I see that particular shade of yellow. The yellow star is etched in my mind like a poisonous flower or, even more sinisterly, a carnivorous flower.

I still see in my mind this small child, going to school, wearing that yellow marker. Just think of twenty little girls, sitting in a classroom, with one or two kids wearing a badge, not of honor but of horror. Marked children, branded like cattle. Eventually, like cattle, some of the branded children were led to the slaughter house.

I am staying here for a few days. The nights are strange and disturbing. I see things, I sleep, and now the walls talk to me again. Low voices speak. I do not understand what they say. Sometimes I think it is my father, the first to disappear, or my mother, gone many years later. Or perhaps my brother.

There is my brother's armchair, standing near the window, in front of the TV. It was his favorite spot. Sometimes now when I wake up, in the middle of the silent night, I think I can see him sitting there, having a conversation with me. He often had stinging, acerbic remarks about life. I did not know him well. I had lost all close contact with him.

He told me once, a very long time ago, to change my life, to come back to France. He never broached the subject again after that one time. I knew that I could never really have a frank conversation with him about my life. He did not want to really hear anything about it.

After these imaginary conversations with my brother, I look again at the chair and realize that it is empty. Then I spent the night listening to noises: the creaking of the wood beneath the carpet, the kitchen noises. I remember how this home, my home, once contained love and joy.

Where did it go? I remember my father sitting in his workroom, working and whistling a little tune. Winking at me every time I passed by his room. Mother cooking in the tiny kitchen. The kitchen looks the same, but we did not have a refrigerator then. We used the cabinet under the windows to keep food cool. The cabinet extended outside.

I remember how difficult it always was to light the water heater above the sink. It was a dangerous thing to do: we lit a match in a small trap door while holding a stiff handle down. I try to do this now and recall my mother calling her husband or son to help. Now I still cannot do it and I have to call my niece Aline, my brother's daughter, for advice. I finally get it work. I am now washing the dishes in the same place my mother used to wash her dishes. It's the same washbasin, all white with a ribbed side for the dishes to dry. I think about my mother's hands washing, and cutting food, and then cleaning that white sink. My gestures are the same as hers. But the kitchen, the walls, the basin, the small table in the corner and the oven are all silent.

I remember the way we had lived. I slept in my father's workroom on a small cot in a corner. I could always see him working while I fell asleep. While I was closing my eyes, He was always sitting on the corner of the big table, sewing, and his mouth was full of pins. He was quietly humming a song in Yiddish. It was such a peaceful moment and I was so happy.

My brother slept in the dining room on a cot against one of the walls. Those two rooms had windows looking out on the noisy street. By ten or eleven at night the sounds from the cars and the cafe subsided. But those noises never bothered any of us anyway. We were used to the background fracas of the streets.

My parents had their own room with a window looking out on the cemented backyard, and it was much quieter. The backyard was mostly used as a passage to the next building. The garbage pails were there; there were no flowers or plants. There were also two apartments on each side of the courtyard. I remember the time when, hiding from the Germans and the French police, my mother and I climbed the steep stairs of that courtyard building up to the last floor, the sixth, to a safe apartment.

I am like an old clock always ticking backwards, missing a tick here and a tock here. Some things stand out in my memory; some hide behind a veil. Sometimes I can peer behind it. But it does not bring me peace. Sometimes I feel caught in a twilight zone between my childhood and the present. I know what happened, and I still do not understand why. I keep asking myself the same question: why did the world stand by and do nothing? I never find an answer.

As a young child, I was filled with love for my family. I adored my father. I loved my mother too, although she was the disciplinarian. My brother was the joker, telling me stories. They were not always true but I believed them. This was my universe. I was a good girl, happy and reasonable. I loved school. It was such a happy time. I lived a happy life without wondering why. And then the world disintegrated into dust.

I close my eyes for a second and I see the little blond girl running downstairs to buy fresh bread with her hair flying around her round face. This morning I did the same thing but I did not fly. I held the wooden ramp. Nothing has changed except me. I am not the same. Or am I? I am going to the same bakery at the corner of my street, same store, same good bread. New owners. A young girl and an old girl, never to meet again.

The windows glisten in the dark, like open eyes on the smoky street. The window is the one through which I saw my father pushed into a black car like a criminal, manhandled by two men in black trench coats. Did I understand what was happening? Probably not. My mother was crying, wringing her hands, and my brother was silent, his face fixed in a mask of hate. He could do nothing; he stood there while our father was taken away. My brother had offered his young life instead of his father's, but to no avail. He just stood there, filled with rage. The arresting men had told my father that if he did not cooperate, they would take my brother too. My father went with them, and with his unalterable belief in the goodness of human beings, he told us to be quiet and to let him go. He would be back soon, because this was just a mistake, he assured us. The nights are long in this apartment. I sleep a little, wake up and lay on the couch listening.

I get up and wander around the rooms, trying to remember where things were. The chimneys, unused, are still there. Pictures and flowers are displayed on top of them. An electric heater now resides inside one of the chimneys. We had had a coal-burning heater when we lived there together.

I remember my mother always sitting on it, as she was always cold. We all took turns near the heater.

After the war, when my mother died, my brother, his wife and daughter moved into this apartment. He changed a few things. He combined the dining room with my father's workroom. I still see the wall separating the two original rooms. I still hear the muffled sounds coming from where my father's Singer sewing machine stood.

I conjure images and sounds from a lost past.

I remember being reunited with my mother and brother and living in a hotel in Paris in 1945 when I came back from Antibes. I had been hidden in a convent and then had to escape to Antibes, where I was sheltered by a couple I will write about later.. The hotel was on rue de Malte, parallel to Boulevard Voltaire. The subway was situated right there; the station was Oberkampf. It was a small room for my mother, my brother and me. The toilet was in the hall outside. The kitchen had a hot plate and a few half-broken dishes and pots and pans, utensils purchased by my mother in a dime store. There was one double bed for my mother and me, and a cot for my brother.

I felt like a stranger in this family that was being reconstituted again. I had no feelings for my mother. I remembered how she had left me alone in the priest's chamber in the convent and how abandoned I felt. She had disappeared behind a door which she had closed by herself without saying a word. I can still hear the click of the door knob. The only person I was close to was my brother. He was the knight in shining armor who had suddenly appeared one day framed in the door at the house in Antibes where I had been hidden by a couple, the Cadusseau's.

There were so many things that I did not understand. I was still too young to grasp why my mother had left me at the convent. We had spent a year on the road, running and hiding

through France. I thought that we would stay together. I did not know what while living in a small rented room in Nice and finally finding a little peace and sense of safety that the Italians were leaving and the Germans were coming in to occupy the region. We had been safe under the Italian occupation. The Italians did not arrest Jews.

I read of events in the newspaper. My mother became frantic, rummaging feverishly through her handbag. She found the piece of paper with some writing on it that she had been looking for. As soon as she found the piece of paper she threw my coat on my shoulder, grabbed her jacket and pulled me out of the room without even turning the lock in the door. I asked her what was going on but she told me to be quiet and walk faster.

This is when she placed me in the convent, when she left me all alone without saying a word in the priest's chamber. She spoke to me only just before we crossed the threshold to this terrible place: "Do not talk, keep everything inside you. Do not answer any questions about yourself or your family and perhaps you will survive." I didn't understand what she was saying, why there was a question of survival. My mother's last words to me.

I was a little child. I could only think that my mother had deserted me and I could not understand why. I felt for many years that I had done something very terrible and that she did not love me anymore. This feeling stayed with me from the time she left me in the priest's chamber until well into my adolescence.

The priest told me in a muffled voice that I would now have a new name and that I must forget everything from my past. He said I did not have parents anymore that I was now an orphan and I would be sent to a convent. What was an orphan? What was a convent? I did not ask him. I remember sitting in the big chair covered in red velvet, trying to blend into the back

of the seat, trying to disappear inside the loose covering of that chair. I remembered trying to not listen but the words seeped into my head and stayed there like little needles and I could not remove them.

I wonder if my mother explained to me what she was doing if I could have understood. It took me a long time to understand. All I knew then was that when the door closed behind my mother, I was left alone. That feeling never completely went away. I did not know then that she was desperately trying to save me.

This is my last night in the apartment. I am going back to New York. I will leave the sights and images behind me. But every time I return I am assailed by the wings of memory. I do not want to forget. There is no one anymore I can talk to about the past. Time is slowly eroding it like water on a stone near a river bank.

Introduction

I was born in Paris in 1933, the year Adolph Hitler came to power.

My parents had planned to name me Pauline. My brother Bernard, who was ten, helped my parents since he spoke French and they didn't--only Yiddish, Polish and Russian. He was known as a “beau parleur”--a smooth talker who could charm his way into women's hearts. Bernard had a crush on the actress Greta Garbo and he wanted me to have her name.

In the hospital, he persuaded the nurse that Greta was my name. My mother was furious at him and called him “meshugener” [a lunatic], and he had to run out of the room and hide from her in the nurse's quarters. She screamed at the nurse in Yiddish about it, but of course the nurse did not understand. But my father liked the name, and when they realized they would have to pay a lawyer to have it changed back, they gave up.

Life was good in Paris, the city of lights, “joie de vivre” and good food. My parents had fled the pogroms in Poland. When they came to Paris, they thought they had found heaven.

On September 1st, 1939, the Nazi invaded Poland without a declaration of war. On September 3rd, England and France declared war on Germany. The German army marched into Paris on June 14, 1940, and the “armistice” was signed on June 22. France was divided into occupied and non-occupied zones.

Later that year, the Germans and Vichy France issued a series of proclamations aimed at excluding Jews from every aspect of everyday life.

I was just a little girl and didn't pay much attention to the rumblings of war. I did not even know what the word meant. Sometimes I think about those years and wonder what I might

have done with my life, what my brother might have done, if Hitler and his hordes of killers had not destroyed every vestige of normality for all of us. Who knows what I or my brother could have accomplished in that sophisticated country.

I had learned to read very quickly. People commented that as a toddler I was always walking around with a book under my arm, not a toy or a doll.

I adored my father, who was always telling me stories in Yiddish, the language we spoke at home. At age 4 I went to kindergarten and, unlike my parents, could soon speak French, and I could then translate for my parents when we went shopping.

My father was a medium-sized man, with a head of grayish curly hair and a generous, well-shaped mouth. His face was always lit by shining, mischievous brown eyes. He was well-shaven and immaculate and always smelled good to me. He was a quiet man who never raised his voice to me or to my brother. My mother was the disciplinarian. My father was known as a “tailleur extraordinaire.” He attracted the best clientele; lawyers, police, doctors and senators. He chose the fabrics, took measurements, cut the suits and completed them for his clients. My mother and my brother usually delivered them to the buyer.

My mother was stout and of medium height. She had blondish hair that was cut short. She had unblemished skin, brown eyes, and a thin line of a mouth. She did not often laugh. Her eyes always seemed to be looking far away. She had experienced pogroms in her native Poland.

She would sometimes talk about the family she and my father had left behind. She spoke as if they did not exist anymore. My father did not share her fears. He always tried to assuage them. He was a firm believer in the goodness of mankind. My mother was the cynic.

Whenever family members or friends came to the apartment, they would have loud discussions. I was much too young to understand. I would leave the room and go to read in my parents' bedroom. My brother would go down into the street and hang out with the other boys.

I was barely seven when it all began. I was told that the Germans entered Paris by the “Porte de la Villette” on June 14, 1940. I did not really pay attention. Of course I had seen the soldiers marching from my window. I had seen their big guns and the tanks rumbling by but I did not pay attention. I wanted to go out to get a pastry at the bake shop. My mother told me that everything was closed and that we had to wait to see what the invaders would do. I was sad; the routine of the days was disrupted and I could not understand why.

I have vague memories of soldiers marching through Paris. I remember an army of men in green uniforms with guns parading by the “Avenue de la Republique” like a giant undulating centipede. The Parisians gathered on the streets to watch the march. We looked out from our balcony. I can still see my mother watching with clenched teeth and my father trying to soothe her: “Do not worry so, we will be fine, they are human beings like us. After all, Germany has such a reputation for culture and civility; nothing is going to happen.”

The sun was shining over the soldiers and over us without discrimination. I looked at some people on the street standing in silence, while others cheered. The soldiers struck the pavement with their highly polished black boots. I still remember the rhythmic, harsh sound of hundreds of boots, marking a black tempo. The parade was meant to instill fear.

We went down into the street. I watched as the tall, unsmiling blond men with blue eyes like mine marched, looking straight ahead. I did not understand what was happening. Some of the soldiers patted me on the head, calling me “schon” (pretty) and gave me bars of chocolate.

My mother gripped my hand and pulled me quickly toward home. She promptly confiscated the chocolate bars and threw them in the toilet. I asked her why she was doing this. She turned her stormy eyes at me and said, "The Germans are our enemies. We do not take anything from an enemy's hand." I did not understand but I was silent. It would take me a few years to understand the concept of "enemy."

Meanwhile the rest of the family had managed to arrive at our apartment. We closed the windows and pulled down the drapes to shut out the loud noise of the clicking heels. No one was hungry; we picked at our food. For once no one told me to eat everything on my plate. The faces around me were pale and somber. Everyone seemed to be talking at the same time. They spoke in Yiddish and in Polish. I did not understand what they were saying; I only knew they were all very upset.

After the fall of Paris, life resumed some semblance of normalcy. The markets reopened and food was available. The subway and buses resumed their regular routes, but there were very few buses; most of them had been requisitioned. We did not yet know why. Paris in summer was lovely and we walked everywhere. In the fall the schools reopened, and my brother and I went back to our classes. Paris waited to see what was going to happen. We had to move the clock forward to be on German time. Stores were slowly reopening. Time seemed to stand still. The days went by.

On Sundays the family gathered to talk about the situation. Everyone was sad; they talked in low voices and picked at their food. I was the only young child there. I did not understand much of what they were saying, but I remembered that before the invasion the family gatherings were jolly and congenial, with good food and laughter. Now food was scarce and

there was no laughter.

In the fall of 1940 the Jews had to register at the local police station. A census was to be taken and ID cards were to be issued to all the Jews. My parents went to register and when they came back they showed us their ID cards. On everyone's picture, the word "Jew" was inscribed in large red letters. My mother looked at my father and said, "So, what have you got to say now?" My father, his head bent a little lower than usual, repeated his mantra: "Wait a little; it will blow over. This is France, after all."

People started to flee Paris. We could see them with valises and boxes leaving on foot or by car. My father, against my mother's wishes, decided to stay.

By May 1942 we had to wear a yellow star, with the word "Juif" inscribed in big black letters on a very loud, blinding yellow color, a shade that put your teeth on edge.

Everyone over the age of six had to wear one at all times in the streets. I was old enough. The yellow tag became part of my outfit. People on the streets gave us strange looks, or avoided looking at us at all. We had suddenly become invisible to some of them. Some gave us furtive looks, their faces became red and they looked away. A few—very few—people shook their heads and said, "It's a shame; we do not agree with this; we are sorry," and hurried away.

Every morning my mother stood on line for bread. I was not allowed to wander off by myself anymore. She would leave very early, around five a.m., and take her place in the queue. My brother would take her place before he went to school, and she came back home to prepare breakfast for us. Then she would return to the line for the long wait for bread and my brother would leave for school.

I did not go to school very often, nor did the other children. My parents were afraid for me. The poisonous atmosphere was invading the schoolroom. My brother had a few incidents when he was called “a dirty Jew” by schoolmates he had known a long time.

Posters denouncing Jews appeared on the city walls. They proclaimed that Jews were the cause of the war. Newspapers were publishing scurrilous stories about the Jewish people. My mother asked my brother to read the stories aloud. My father kept assuring her that everything would turn out all right. “Just a few rabble rousers,” he said. “We came to France because the French people are essentially decent and cultured. Let's just wait it out; all will be well. It will stop. After all, they are human beings like us.” My father, my dear father with his beliefs in “La belle France” and its great culture. My father, the believer in goodness.....

Children did not need IDs yet. Our names were printed on our parents' IDs. We seemed to have enough food for a while, but by 1941 it was becoming a problem. Food tickets (cartes d'alimentation) were given out at City Hall and everyone had a different number and letter. According to your letter, you received less or more of an allotment of food.

There was almost no food at all for elderly people. I have a vivid memory of vitamins being distributed in class: small, pink and very sour. We also received cookies with vitamins. I ate them all and sometimes when the teacher was not looking, I would hide a few in my pocket to bring home.

My mother waited on line for hours for those tickets. Queues for food were becoming commonplace. The general population looked ragged and unkempt. My mother often remarked about how jolly and well-fed the Germans and their followers looked.

I do not remember how my parents made a living during those days. I have vague images of my father working late at night. My mother would deliver the completed garment, placed inside a big black and flat bag, the following day. She did not want my brother to do it; there were rumors of young men disappearing on the streets. But I think she too went out less often. There was less and less work. The Germans effectively closed up all of the Jewish businesses. Notices reading “Entreprise Juive” appeared in the front of stores all over Paris.

I don't know how my parents and family survived. There must have been some money in their bank accounts, but eventually the Germans eliminated the accounts of Jews in the banks; simply closed them up. I can surmise that my mother, anticipating the worst, took money out before the account was closed so we could live.

Then I heard about the massive roundup of Jews in the 11th district in 1941 (“La grande raffle du 11eme arrondissement”). The Germans closed off the entire section, shut down the “metro” and arrested the Jews in the streets, cafes, stores and in their homes. They walked around with lists of names provided by the French police. They stopped people in the street, waving guns in their faces.

Somehow my parents escaped the roundup. We not on the list that time. My mother later told me that we all remained inside for the duration of the “Aktion.” We hid behind closed doors in the dark so as not to attract attention. This was 1941 and somehow my father maintained he was still hopeful about the outcome. My mother was silent.

No one knew what was going to happen to all of those who were arrested: men, women (some pregnant), young and old, babies and children.

In September 1941, the “Palais Berlitz,” a museum, held a major exhibition called “The Jews and France.” The exhibit was organized by a French organization called “The French Institute for the Jewish Question (“Institut Francais des questions Juives”). It created a stir. There were long lines of French people waiting to get in.

Just after the exhibition, a number of synagogues were blown up.

My parents never attended synagogue. They had left their orthodox upbringing in the “shtetl” behind. Religion was not a part of our life in France. Politics was discussed, but not religion. We still had family reunions together at my Aunt Esther's house every Easter and Christmas.

Around the dinner table with the family, the latest events were discussed. The family discussed this sudden explosion of hatred. Where did it come from, this violent hatred for the Jews? My parents had lived in Paris for two years and had not experienced anything like this. Had the Germans brought it with them, or was it an old story revived? Jews were aware of the Dreyfus affair. A French captain, he was tried for high treason in 1894 and sentenced to life imprisonment on Devils Island, off the coast of the penal colony on French Guiana. He was finally rehabilitated in 1906, totally innocent of the crime. False evidence had convicted him. But the Dreyfus affair split French public opinion into two opposing camps. Emile Zola had posted a public letter, in support of Drefyus, “J'Accuse!” in 1898. The turmoil created by the affair had a long-lasting impact, unleashed on those who had run away from pogroms and tried so hard to assimilate, learning the difficult French language and wanting to meld into all aspects of French life.

After all, my parents had come to France because they considered it a vibrant, cultured, safe and joyous country. They had left their country of birth and their entire families because of the pogroms in Poland and had taken a chance on France.

In 1941 not everyone in France was echoing the refrain of “Kill the Jews.” This was just the beginning. No one knew exactly what was happening in Germany to the Jews, another highly “cultured” country.

Later I learned there was a round up (“raffle”) of Jews in July 1942. The Germans and the French police again arrested masses of people everywhere: in the streets, apartments, shops, subways. They were taken to the Velodrome d'Hiver, a glass-roofed sports arena with grandstands where bicycle races were held in winter. The French police closed five “arrondissements” (districts) and picked up thousands of Jews, men, women, children, old people, sick people, pregnant women and babies. Those who were arrested on the streets had to leave everything behind; those taken from their homes could quickly grab a few things. They were all taken away on the public green buses stationed in the streets, motors running, and ready to depart with those who did not know why and where they were going. Now we understood why the green buses had disappeared from the city's streets.

I was told that at least fifteen thousand people, five thousand of whom were children, were imprisoned like cattle inside the sports arena without food and water or sanitary facilities. Hundreds of dead bodies were carried out after a few days.

One day my brother persuaded my mother that she allow him to do the deliveries. We needed to collect the money for the tailoring work my father had done. My brother was arrested as he came up the stairs from the subway and was tossed into a green bus. My mother was frantic when he did not come back; no one could tell her where her son was. After a few days of agonizing uncertainty, my brother reappeared with another young boy. They told us they had escaped from the arena, taking advantage of the enormous chaos reigning inside and outside.

The young boy returned to his family. My mother forbade my brother from going outside, but this was impossibility. He was young and smart and we needed him to do errands. From then on my mother was a nervous wreck every time he ventured out.

All the government buildings and monuments in Paris were covered with flying swastikas.

No one helped. No one tried to stop the police or the Germans. People were silent as entire families were carted away in broad daylight. The Vichy government headed by Marechal Petain passed anti-Semitic laws and assisted the Nazis in deporting the Jews.

My mother slipped out into the street; she had to buy food. She made a detour to the "Place de la Republique." We lived nearby. Before the invasion, I would go with my mother to the carousel, a wonderful arrangement of carved wooden horses, glass mirrors and organ-grinding music. I would choose a horse and sit on it, pretending it was real. My mother would sit on a chair just under our own statue of liberty, right in the middle of the park. Now all the games were closed.

I remember the first impressions the Germans made on me when we went food shopping together. I saw clean-shaven soldiers with blond hair and blue eyes like myself. They were

bigger and taller than the average Frenchman. They were all wearing the same uniforms with shiny black boots and guns. They stood around the Place de la Republique, indifferent to their surroundings. Some directed traffic, mostly their own cars and trucks. Some dressed in gray leather coats, helmeted to the eyebrows. My mother pulled me away. I was fascinated; I had never seen such people. Sometimes those soldiers would smile at me and give me chocolate. My mother rushed back home, forgetting to stop for food. She hurried as quickly as she could, dragging me along, mumbling under her breath. I asked her what she was saying but she just pulled me along more forcefully. When we got home, she sent my brother down to buy food. I did not understand why she was so upset about the soldiers giving me sweets. It was not only because they were the enemy. Much later, after the war, we heard stories about the Germans kidnapping blond children to be raised in Aryan families. I wonder if my mother suspected something. She was so much more attuned to what was happening than my father was. She imagined the worst. She was right and my poor father was wrong. Deadly wrong.

One day at lunch, she sent me to my room and told me to close the door. I overheard snippets of a loud conversation between her and my father. I did not understand the meaning of their argument. But now I am sure they were returning to the same conflict between them: my mother wanted to run away but my father wanted to stay. We would wait it out. It would soon be over.

It would soon be over for him.

The men in black trench coats took my beloved father away. They stood in the middle of the apartment with guns in their hands like black crows in a field. My mother cried and my

brother said to them, "Take me, I am younger and stronger. I can work." I hung on to my father's jacket. I did not understand. The two men stood there, stone-faced. One of them moved one of his hands with the gun; with the other hand he motioned my father to start moving. Without a word my father took my hands away and pushed me towards my mother. Then my father went toward the door taking his favorite maroon coat and his white scarf. Before the door closed, my father looked at us and said, "Don't worry. I'm sure it's a mistake. I will be back soon. Bernard, take care of your mother and sister." He kissed us while the two men watched, expressionless. I remember the black car. When I think about my father, it is this black car that I see. I watch from the window. I see him pushed into it by two men in trench coats, two Frenchmen. I look down into the street from my little balcony. The windows are open. It is a beautiful day. Father looks up, blows me a kiss, disappears inside the black car. The door closes. My father has gone. I will never see him again. I am so young. I do not understand.

I am an old woman now. And I am trying to make sense of my life. Until I was six years old, I had a normal childhood: kindergarten, and then grammar school. I learned to read at a very early age. I loved books. I only carried a book tucked under my arm: no bag, no bracelets, no doll, only a book held close to my heart.

We had had good times in the beautiful city of Paris. The family had weekly dinners, and we went on vacations. In summer we all went to the park and had picnics. It was a good life. Then a dark cloud floated about and slowly covered Europe.

I had been told that people were snatched from their homes, even from the streets, literally disappearing. I heard the dreaded sirens sounding over and over. We had to run to shelters and hide. I heard that gas masks were distributed, but since we were foreigners, we were

not allowed to have them. School attendance became sporadic. My parents were afraid to let us go to school.

Then on that day, two men came and took my father away. One day he was there; the next he was gone. And my brother was gone soon after my father. They both disappeared. I asked my mother about them. She did not answer. I wondered why and how it had happened. Why were men in black trench coats with guns allowed to take people away?

We had to adapt. We did, because my mother had a strong will to survive. My mother's eyes were rimmed in red every day. She did try to put up a good front. We did not see a lot of the family. Everyone was keeping a low profile. Once in a while one of them would come over just to check if we were all right. I was told that they were all making plans to leave the city.

Somehow we had enough to eat. How did my mother manage it? She had no skills; she had always worked with my father. But there was food on the table every day.

I looked for my missing father and brother every day. Waiting at the window, looking down, watching every man walking in the street below, hoping they would reappear, materialize from the thin air, climb up the stairs, come in and sit down between my mother and me. Then my family would be complete again.

My mother ran here and there to find out where they were. Eventually she found out where my father was, but learned nothing about my brother. My father was being held in a camp by the name of Drancy.

We went by train to the little suburb of Drancy. Hundreds of women and children were standing before the barbed wire surrounding the camp's tall buildings. The imprisoned men were

looking out of the windows at the women and children below. Some were hanging out from the open windows to try to see their families. Kisses were blown in the air. My mother suddenly pointed up at a silhouette in a maroon coat and a white scarf: "Look up, there's your father, he is waving to us! Do you see him?" I saw a man with a white scarf around his neck; yes, it was my father's favorite white scarf. I blew him kisses. Then the guards started to shout and point their guns upwards. The men moved back inside and the windows were closed. Only shadows could be seen behind the darkened windows. This was the last time I had a glimpse of my father.

Did I ever really have a father? A brother? Was this family life all a dream? Was I such a naughty girl? Was I being punished? What had I done wrong?

I was growing up at a rapid pace. How much did I understand? I know that those years on the run shaped my outlook on life. I grew like a weed, trying to survive.

I survived, hiding first in a convent, then staying with a Christian couple, not knowing if I still had a mother, a father or a brother.

I survived by being another person, having a different name, living with parents who were not my parents.

I remember being silent, not talking much. My mother would tell me when she left me behind: "Do not talk, keep silent, mind the people in charge who are going to help you and save your life." How could I understand this, I was so young. But I listened to my mother's voice which spoke to me in my head. I obeyed and I think it saved my life.

I remember very well that many hidden children wrote to their parents from their hidden places, as I did, once a month. They gave their address; I did not. People in charge of picking up the mail were sometimes arrested, letters confiscated and read. The messengers, all young women

and men, were shot on the spot. Then the Germans went to each address on each letter. The hidden children and their protectors were rounded up and sent to the camps.

I think that keeping silent colored my life. I grew up keeping to myself: listening but not talkative. Then I became an adolescent with all the problems of growing up. I was known in my circle of friends as the silent one.

I looked upon life with my eyes closed; I did not want to see reality as it really was. I wanted to forget my childhood from age seven to twelve. I thought that everything would solve itself if I was left alone. When I think of my childhood during the war, I never had a doll to play with or a stuffed animal. I was too busy staying alive. There was adolescence; then married life. I did not know anything about marriage. I continued to remain silent. I did what I had to do but no more.

Something in my life would always be missing. Growing up without a father, I did not know how to relate to a man. It was difficult even to relate to my mother. She was like a stranger to me. And I am sure that I was a stranger to her. Between the ages of 8 and 12, I had to decide on my own what to do and make my own life-saving decisions. I learned very early on to only rely on myself.

After liberation, I got married and my husband and I lived with my mother. It was not easy. My daughter was born. Life became more and more difficult. My husband was in the Army and I was working. My husband's family in the United States asked us to join them. Papers were issued only for him. As soon as he secured a job in the United States, he would be able to obtain papers for me and my daughter. I arrived in New York on February 1960.

In New York, I was left to my own devices. My mother died soon after my arrival, and I had no one to consult about how to raise a child. When my daughter grew up, I knew that I had to tell her about my life. She did not initially want to know. Claudine-Judith insisted she was French and that was all she had to say on the subject. I became very angry with myself, not with her. My silence had planted seeds which I now had to extract.

Everyday now, my daughter and I had a life story session. She had no choice but to listen. She did not want to hear about the war and about what had happened to a whole family: her own, and an entire people simply because they were Jews. I told her about my life growing up in Paris from 1939 to 1945.

She had many nightmares after our talks. It took time for her to understand the ramifications and connect the dots. She came to realize that while she was French because she was born in Paris, just as I was, the core of our identity was Jewish.

Now my family calls her the reborn Jew. She keeps a kosher home and raised my granddaughter in the Jewish faith. My granddaughter received a “Batsmisva,” a Jewish rite of passage from childhood to adulthood, when she turned 12.

When she turned 16, Hannah Charlotte participated in the March of the Living. She traveled through Poland and stood in silence in front of Auschwitz, where my father was killed. She came back and did not want to talk about the trip. She is a photographer and brought back terrible pictures of the camps she had visited.

As to myself, I have my doubts about religion. My question will always be: Why did

God allow this senseless killing of his so-called chosen people? I have no answer. Being true to myself, I keep silent.

I am getting older and near the end of the road. I cannot reconcile with the idea of God. W Did He really create life? If so, for what purpose? For the human tragedy? I have, of course, no answer. We try to survive and hope that the new generation will know more. I am not sure they will. I do not know if history literally repeats itself, but human nature is immutable.

Sometimes I think about that little girl, that innocent little blond girl thrown into a maelstrom of terror which she could not understand. A lost canoe, without a canoeist or a paddle.

Name change. Hair cut. Escape. Hide. Lose your identity. Survive. Repress who you are. I still ask myself: how was this all possible? It happened to many hundreds of thousands. And the worst horrors of all happened to more than six million.

Now I am telling my story in order to remember the sequence of events which impacted my life. I stored them long enough within without having the courage to actually exhume them. It has been a painful voyage without end.

I just know that I have to remember all that happened to the small child that I once was. I have to remember and tell my story so that perhaps the same pattern will be not be repeated—so that other innocent children will not become victims of a mad world.

Chapter One: Paris 1933-1939

I was born in 1933. My father was so happy; he had a little girl. To have a child born in 1933 in Paris, the city of lights, in a free country, was a blessing, or so my parents had thought. They had arrived a couple of years earlier, escaping from the pogroms in Poland. My parents thought that France was the closest thing to paradise, of “la joie de vivre and liberte pour tous.” My mother used to talk about it that way. My parents were able to find an apartment with running water, electricity and heat—with a water closet, which was a luxury. This, and being able to work freely and getting paid for it, was the sum total of happiness.

We lived on a street near “La Republique,” a very central, popular section of the city. We had just moved there. My street, “Rue de Nemours,” was a small street sandwiched between “rue Oberkampf” and “Avenue de la Republique.” We lived on the first floor. There were two apartments per floor; we were on the right, off the staircase. There was no elevator, but the building only had six floors. We had a very nice place with three rooms and a bedroom with a window on the courtyard that was my parents' room. When we needed a shower, we had a public bath and shower just down the street.

The kitchen only had an open gas range and no oven. When my mother prepared a roast, she brought it down to the baker and he would cook it for us. We didn't have a refrigerator, but we had what we called a “garde manger,” a large box sitting on the outside kitchen window. Most perishable goods were placed in there. In Paris during those days everyone bought food twice a day, so we did not really need refrigeration. I can still remember the sweet smell of the fresh bread and pastries baked right there at the corner of our street. My brother was in charge of

getting the fresh baguette, milk and butter. He was always late in returning because he stopped to buy his favorite comics and sweets: “zan,” which turned your tongue yellow. And a long ribbon of black licorice. I always wanted the same thing: a chocolate bun, hot from the baker's oven, and a bowl of “café au lait.”

I was in kindergarten. My mother took me to school situated Rue des Trois Bornes, in the morning after a breakfast of “croissant et café au lait.” Lots of milk and a few drops of coffee. I remember the reddish brick color of the building, with a few steps to climb up to the door. It was a very airy building with lots of space and large windows. We had to cross the “Avenue de la République” coming and going from school. What a pretty avenue, shaded with large trees and benches for people to sit on. My mother would come back to the school to take me to lunch. She had done the food shopping in the morning and had set the table. My father was waiting for us, looking out from the small balcony in the dining room. My brother was there too. For lunch we had steak and “pommes frites” with a vegetable and a big salad. Everyone had wine; I had a drop, diluted with lots of water. Then we had a choice of cheeses or yogurts. For desert we had an apple tart or a chocolate éclair. The adults had coffee.

Paris was a lovely city to stroll in, with theaters, music and movies. My mother loved the movies; she went every week. My mother especially liked to sit in the Parisian cafes and have a coffee or a drink. She would meet a few friends, watch people go by, and talk about the good life she and her friends were enjoying now—to be able to go to the stores and buy all kinds of food; to earn enough money to feed a family of four. We were happy.

Much later I heard stories of the way my parents had lived in Poland, and the families they had left behind. But my brother knew first hand. He was born in Poland and came to

France with my parents at the age of 10. He remembered, but he did not want to talk about it. Here in Paris he was going to school, learning French and looking forward to a good life. He was a happy youngster; he even received a bicycle for his birthday. The bicycle, however, did not work out well. As soon as he learned how to ride it, he was run over by a car, landed in the hospital for a few weeks and got a big scar on his right cheek. My mother forbade him from riding the bike after that.

Then my mother decided my brother had to learn to play the violin, a safer hobby. My parents purchased a second-hand violin and my brother started lessons. It did not go well. He loved music but he was not a learner. Violin lessons lasted a year and my brother finally gave up and told my parents they better sell the instrument. He was adamant about it. My parents were unhappy, but I wasn't; I couldn't stand the screechy sound coming from that violin. My mother did not give up; she turned to me and suggested I take up the piano. I was interested, but the events of that time conspired to put a stop to all of my mother's desires to have a child of hers learn a musical instrument.

By 1939 ugly noises about war were flying about us, but I did not know what war was yet. I was still going to school when shrieking siren alarms started to sound more frequently.

At school, when the sirens sounded, we would, under the teacher's urgent prodding, get in line and walk from the school to the bomb shelter which was just across the street. I and the other little girls ran to hide in a dark place and wondered if it was a game. The teacher was so determined and frantic that we realized this was something very serious.

When we were all safely settled in the single dark room at the bottom of a steep staircase, sitting on the cold floor, the teacher made us sing. We held hands, singing loudly to drown out the

outside noises and fill up the silence of the cave-like room. All the songs were joyous ones and we soon forgot, as children often do, why we were sitting in that dark, dank place. When the sirens rang announcing the end of the alert, we marched back to school, still singing and waited for our crazed parents to arrive and take us home. And we resumed a normal life until the next time.

At the end of the school day at four o'clock, my mother was always waiting. We would walk home slowly, first stopping at the bakery. Many kids and their mothers were already there waiting on line for the hot chocolate croissants fresh from the oven. We waited with anticipation, jumping up and down, stomachs growling and mouths watering. When the croissants appeared, the children cheered, yelling and hopping around until the mothers paid. We would wolf them down without stopping to breathe. Of course one was not enough, so we begged for another. We had to wait for the next batch. Then we walked home. All the children said goodbye to each other, subdued after all the excitement, sated with the delicious pastries.

Walking through the quiet, tree-lined streets of my neighborhood, watching people walking their dogs, my mother and I would stop in one of the numerous small parks. I would go to the swings and play in the sandbox. I also liked to sit on the bench near my mother and watch the birds. It was quiet under the shining sun and the blue sky. We were at peace.

I would smile at the old people sunning themselves in that tranquil park, an oasis of coolness and peace and majestic trees. I loved my city.

Then we would stroll back home, my mother stopping to shop in the food stores. On the rue Oberkampf, we stopped at the pastry shop and bought a fresh fruit tart, big enough for four. Further on down that street we bought fresh fruits and vegetables. We went to the best butcher

and the best baker for the crispy bread just out of the oven. I would munch on it as we winded our way home. By the time we got home, half the bread was gone and my brother had to run down and buy another baguette.

My father and brother would be waiting for us at home. My parents had adapted quickly to the French custom in “La belle France” of having a good bottle of wine at lunch or dinner. My mother would send my father to buy the wine. This was his job and he had become adept at selecting a good bottle, just like a real Frenchman. He would spend a long time making up his mind about which bottle to buy. Even though he did not speak French, he could point at the bottle he wanted.

Sometimes I would come home and I would get a whiff of what my mother was cooking. Everyone was where they were supposed be: my mother in the kitchen, my father in his workroom, sitting hunched over a piece of garment, knees crossed, pulling a threaded needle through the lapel of a blazer he was finishing. My brother was doing his homework on a corner of the dining room table. It was so safe; I felt loved by all. Then we all sat down to eat. Children were not allowed to speak during the meal, only when we were served dessert. This was okay with me but not with my brother. My mother was very strict. Once in a while, when my mother was in the kitchen fetching the next plate of food, my father would whisper a few words to us and we would answer quietly. It was fun to play a little game behind my mother's back.

My mother loved our neighborhood, the parks, shops, and open air markets. She knew everybody and the best places to shop. We all knew the neighbors and the small business owners. We spoke with our neighbors in French, Yiddish or Polish, the language my parents

spoke. The cafe across from us had a telephone, and the owner would come out in the street and shout my brother's name and my brother would run down to take the call.

We would gaze down at the panorama of the streets from our two balconies. We threw a few sous to the street singers. I liked to watch the knife grinder, stopping just under our windows and shouting for people to come down with their knives to be sharpened. I could see the moving cars, the green buses and the policemen with their ample navy blue pelerines on the avenue at the end of our street.

We would visit my aunt Esther, who cooked most of the big dinners on holidays. The occasions were very festive. The whole family sat around a beautifully laid-out table with white tablecloth and napkins. The children played dominoes afterwards. I won all the time. We all went for a stroll in the Parc des Buttes Chaumont. It was a beautiful garden. I remember the hard green metal chairs, the scent of the flowers, the water fountains, the birds looking for scraps, the music kiosk where we listened to concerts on Sunday. The best treat for us was the “guignol,” talking puppets on a miniature stage. To complete the day we were treated to “les Gauffres sucrées,” sugared waffles.

One time my mother brought a live chicken. She asked my gentle father to kill it. He ran after the poor hapless bird but was unable to catch it. He was not really trying. He finally took his coat and left for a walk. I had to assist my mother in catching the chicken. When she had it safely under her arm, we walked down to the butcher and asked him to do the job.

I still see her in the small kitchen, one hand cleaning the chicken, the other preparing to peel the potatoes. She seemed to twirl around in that small space like a dancer. I washed the leaves for the salad and put them in a metal sieve and shook them dry through the window. My

mother's specialty from the old country was “cholent,” an Ashkenazi dish. My mother always spoke about this dish as if it was a precious thing, edible gold mixed in with the sour dough of the pogroms from Poland. It contained beans, potatoes, onions, sometimes ground meat and always chicken fat, great gobs of it. It was, as she was fond of saying, food for the “Ureme Jews”--very poor Jews.

We brought the baking dish down to the bakery and for a few francs the baker cooked it in his oven. It baked for a very long time, from morning to night. Just before all the guests sat down to dinner, my brother would go down to the bakery and bring it up.

I remember my brother reverently placing the steaming pot in the middle of the table, and the guests making appropriate noises of appreciation. While it was cooling off, we had chicken soup with “kreplach” (filled dumplings) and “Kishke” (stuffed derma). My mother also prepared “Pecha,” boiled beef feet, not one of my favorites. Then there was gefilte fish (carp filled with ground pieces of fish) and carrots eaten with “chain” (relish). In the background the famous Tino Rossi sang on the radio. My mother loved him.

Then we had “keiss-kih'en,” cheese cake and “leyker with raisins,” which was a delicious round cake with a hole in the middle, like a wheel, bought in the Marais, the Yiddish section of Paris. We really ate all that food.

But it became difficult to buy food. Life changed very quickly as the frightening sounds of war began to edge closer. There were many alerts when planes flew over Paris. They came at night, throbbing, distant at first and then they were right upon us and we had to run to the dark shelter. Days became heavy with sadness and filled with fear.

We were not observant Jews, and I never went to a synagogue before the war or after.

But the family treated Saturday as a different kind of Sabbath ritual: a day without work—a family day. We took long walks all over Paris.

That was my family's way of remembering the old country and the family they had left behind. They had left a terrible country and went straight into the jaws of anti-Semitism.

That Saturday ritual began to erode until it disappeared completely, never to be renewed again. And then we would all go our separate ways, trying to survive.

Chapter Two: Paris, 1939-1942

The weather was wonderful that year. The spring was filled with soft winds, and new green leaves covered the branches of the trees lined up on the avenues and the boulevards. The neighborhood parks were covered in green grass and flowers. The sun was shining over all.

At the dining table, the family talked about the seeming impossibility of Jews being the target of the kind of anti-Semitism that was engulfing Germany. My father kept insisting it couldn't happen here. My mother kept repeating that all the males in the family should leave and hide. Not one member of the family agreed with her. They shushed her, told her she was imagining things and creating unnecessary panic. But my mother had the gift of Cassandra, the gift of prophecy but no one believed her. She was proven right at the end

The noises of war were closing in. A state of siege existed in Paris. Rifle-carrying policemen and plainclothes inspectors stopped people in the streets for I.D. Checks. The newspapers announced in blaring headlines that food rationing tickets would be issued at city hall. Sugar would be rationed starting in June, but not bread.

We saw people leaving Paris without their belongings, taking only the few things they could carry. They left on foot or by train. Those who had cars abandoned them. The wealthier people retired to their castles or villas in the country, away from the city. The working class and the poor stayed. We had nowhere to go.

Food was still available; my father was still working. My brother and I went to school in spite of the air raids and the sirens. The cafes did a brisk business. Coffee was no longer available, but people drank a substitute made from chicory and malt and exchanged news about the situation.

I was told that there was an anti-aircraft gun on top of the Arch of Triumph and that sandbags were placed around some statues. A few men in uniforms were promenading calmly around the streets in Paris.

June 6th: a beautiful and seemingly calm day. People were leaving in droves. City buses were evacuating children. Cars, bicycles, and horses pulling carts filled with people fled the city. Gas masks were issued to the Parisians. We did not receive them as we were not French citizens.

As Jews who had recently arrived in France, my parents had very few options. Where could they run now? They had seen Jews killed in the streets in Poland. They had to stay put. “Anyway,” my father argued, “we have nowhere to go. Paris is still safe and we will wait it out.”

June 14th: The city was amazingly quiet. The only noise we heard was the thundering of hundreds of boots. The Germans were parading in the streets. Parisians and Jews stayed inside.

Paris was occupied. We were under German law. They imposed a nightly curfew of 9 p.m. Since Paris had to switch to German time, this meant that the actual curfew was 8 p.m.

June 22nd: The armistice was signed.

During the first days of the German occupation, we could see the French people standing on the sidewalks applauding the parading German army. In the following weeks the Germans gave concerts in the parks.

July 10th: We had a new head of state, Marechal Petain. I remember we had to sing a song to him everyday in school: “Marechal here we come, In front of us is France’s destiny...” We sang that song every morning standing up with our hands on our hearts. There were pictures of the Marechal all over the school. The pictures seemed to have sprung up on the walls

overnight, as well as on government buildings and in stores. The teacher told us that he was a wise and dedicated soldier who was helping to reconstruct France.

Large posters appeared on the walls of Paris, ugly cartoons caricaturing the Jews. Then the radio started broadcasting violent diatribes against the Jews, and the movie theaters ran films denouncing the Jews. The newspapers wrote nasty articles and cartoons about the Jews. Notices were posted on the city walls and shops: No entry to Jews, dogs and Negroes.

My mother kept saying that things would get even worse. My father was still in denial. He continued to try to calm her. I listened to their heated arguments but did not understand much. My brother understood more. He was older and spent a lot of time with his friends on the streets. He heard and saw more of what was going on.

An exposition was held at the Palais Berlitz entitled “Le Juif et la France” (The Jew and France). College teachers were ordered to take all of their students to view it. My brother went and told us what he'd seen: pictures and drawings of Jews with hooked noses, bulging eyes, hanging lips and large ears jutting out on each side of their heads. Printed essays expounded on the dangers represented by the Jews to France and the world. My brother went on and on. I looked at myself in a mirror. I was not like that at all; neither was my brother nor my parents. I could not imagine why people were saying such terrible things about us. My mother looked at my father and said, “Nu, Yidele, what do you say now? Am I right or wrong?” My father gave his usual litany: it would pass; people were not bad at heart.

We soon saw signs posted on Jewish stores which forbade anyone from shopping there. We saw other signs: “Mort aux Juifs” (Death to the Jews) posted on the walls of houses. Movie theaters, cafes, and public parks were “verboten” to Jews.

I could not go to my neighborhood square to play anymore. I could not get my “petit pain au chocolate” from my favorite bakery. I would ask my mother, but just looking at her stormy face made me give up asking.

Now all public places were “Interdit aux chiens et aux Juifs”--forbidden to dogs and Jews. We were given only a few hours to buy food. My mother ran everywhere trying to get enough for us in the short time allotted. The prices were getting higher as well. We were not allowed in the streets after 8 p.m.

October, 1940: My parents had to go to the police station to obtain a large stamp affixed to their alien ID cards and on the food card. The stamp had the word “Jew” in black letters.

From the beginning of June 1942, all Jews from age six had to wear the yellow star. It was a six-pointed star in yellow with black lettering spelling out the word “Jew.” We had to wear it on the left side of the chest, solidly sewn into the garment.

I had to go to school with my star. Neighbors, people we had known for many years, darted a furtive look at the star and looked away quickly. Some of them even crossed the street to avoid passing me. Men and women and children, people I had known all my life, people who would pinch my cheeks or pat me on the head ignored me, walked around me, as if I did not exist anymore. We could no longer sit in a cafe; we were too conspicuous with our yellow marker. So we went back home. My friends in school suddenly stopped being my friends. Their parents had told them not to play or talk to me.

We were slowly but surely becoming the strangers, the “other.” There were too many of us—Jews—around. We were inconvenient, an embarrassment. We were perceived a threat hanging over the streets of Paris. My mother told me that the stern looks of some of our

neighbors seemed to suggest it was our fault that these things were happening. She remarked with bitterness that the shopkeepers were not as friendly as they used to be. It was like an insidious poison being injected into the air.

Now that we wore the yellow star, shopping for food became a major expedition fraught with danger. Only one neighbor, Monsieieur Triquet, had the courage to speak up. His son, Jacques, continued to be my best friend while we remained in Paris.

We were becoming invisible.

The family gathered together for lunch and many ideas were exchanged. Voices were raised. During those dinners I would finish eating quickly and go to hide in the next room, trying to read, putting my hands over my ears to shut out the conversation of the adults.

My parents tried to keep working as much as they could. Being a tailor and working from the apartment, my father had few confrontations. Over the years he had developed a good relationship with some of the police. High ranking policemen came to him for their tailoring. When they came, they always brought me a little gift, a piece of chocolate or candies.

I remember the room where my young, innocent life came to an end. The clock of life stopped ticking. A room with a window, and a small balcony; white curtains blowing under the light breeze. A marble chimney mantle with a few pictures; a dining room table set with dishes and four chairs. A dresser filled with fishes, shining behind the glass door; a vase filled with pink and yellow flowers. Dust particles danced in a golden ray of sunshine. Piercing the room with a gilded sword.

My father, a shadowy figure in the shimmering haze was standing near the marble chimney. The family had been listening to the radio. The broadcaster spoke of the round-up of Jews in the streets and private homes of Paris. He reported that the ordinary citizens of Paris were denouncing their Jewish neighbors to the French police. My mother shut off the radio. My father, as usual, tried to appease her.

We were about to sit down for lunch. My mother was standing near the window. Car doors suddenly opened and slammed shut in the otherwise quiet street. In front of the house, there was a black car pulling up, long and menacing as a hearse.

“I see them,” my mother said through clenched teeth. “Two men in dark coats are coming into the house.” Heavy, menacing steps struck the first floor and stopped before our door.

The door knob rattled furiously. Sharp threatening voices shouted, “Open the door immediately! This is the French police. Otherwise we will break down the door.”

We stood in the hallway. My mother, white as a sheet, whispered to my father, “Run, Yidele, hide! Go out the bedroom window; it's a short jump to the ground. You have a few minutes before they break in.”

“These men are not savages,” my father said. “If they take me away, it's just for work. I am a good person and so are they. I will go with them.” He said these final words clearly in his normal speaking voice and went to open the door.

Two men were standing on the threshold like crows with shrill voices, screeching orders. One was a policeman in a knee-length navy blue cape, a round hat on his head and shiny black shoes. The other one was wearing a black raincoat. Their hats covered their eyes, and they

stood there with their hands in their pockets.

They pushed my father and the rest of us through the narrow hallway, forcing us into the dining room, where we all remained mute, transfixed with fear. My mother had a pinched look on her face, a slow red emerging on her cheeks. Her twitching hands were clasped behind her back. My brother had backed away against the wall near my father. His face was white, the scar on his cheek was moving spasmodically. I stood behind my mother, silent as a mouse. I heard words but could not comprehend them. My throat was constricted with fear. My father was the only one with a smile on his face.

One of the men said, "Which one of you men is Judka Herensztat? Speak up." My father answered, "I am Judka Herensztat. What do you want?"

Pointing a black-gloved finger at my father, the other man said, "You come with us. You are being sent to a work camp. No luggage is allowed. Everything will be provided for you. Let's move quickly or we'll take your son too."

My brother walked toward the men and said, "Please do not take him away. I will come with you instead. I am younger and stronger. I can work better and longer. Leave my father here, please." The man with the gloved hand pushed him away. "Be quiet," he said with a contorted smile, "your turn will come soon enough."

My mother started to cry and said, "Please do not take him away; we need him. He has to finish an order for a very important man in the police department. Come back next week and he will go with you."

"No," said one of the men, "he has to come with us. We have orders; we have to arrest the head of the family. If he wasn't here we'd take the next male in the household. Enough talk.

Let's go.” He moved one of his hands in his pocket as if he was holding a gun inside. I had moved slowly and quietly to my father's side. I was little; the men did not notice me. I was holding on to him. I thought that perhaps this way they would not be able to detach me from him. Tears were running down my face.

My mother packed a small bag with a few clothing items. No luggage, they repeated. My father had put on his maroon coat and wrapped his favorite white silk scarf loosely around his neck.

My mother stood there, wringing her hands, powerless. My brother was frozen. I stayed beside my father. The men started to push my father towards the door. I would not let go. My father tried to shake me away. My mother pulled me. When they reached the door, the men realized that I was still glued to my father. They tried to tear me away with brute force, pulling my arms and shoulders. I wrestled with them, not relinquishing my hold on my father. Then my father stopped them. He said, “Let me do it.” He slowly but firmly detached my body from his, gave me a kiss and pushed me into my mother's arms. And with a last look at his petrified family, my sweet innocent father went away with his captors.

Later I was told that I let out such a scream that even the men turned around to look at me. But they did not stop moving down the stairs with my father imprisoned between them. My mother covered her face with her hands; she was sobbing. My brother was pulling his hair out and screaming curses at the men.

We ran to the open window and saw him being pushed into the back of the black car.

I do not remember how long it took to destroy our family forever. While it was happening, it seemed like a long time. I caught a glimpse of his face and the white scarf while he

was shoved into the back of the car. The car doors were slammed. The black car drove away. The street was silent and strangely deserted. We were ignored by the neighbors who knew us so well. It seemed that we were the only people still alive on the street.

I remember to this day how my father looked in his maroon coat, his white scarf, his whitish hair and dark eyes, looking back at us sadly. Did he still think that all men were good?

So quietly my father went. Believer in the goodness of all men. Like smoke from a chimney, disappearing in the sky. Ashes, falling on the meadows.

My father.

The rest of the day was spent in silence. My brother went to tell the rest of the family what had just happened. I stayed close to my mother. I even stayed with her in the toilet. I was terribly afraid of someone coming to take her away too. Then what would happen to me?

Every time I heard a car going by in the street, I ran to the window to look outside. Perhaps it had been a mistake as my father had said and he was coming back. Or perhaps “they” were coming for the rest of us.

My aunt Esther and her husband Mietek, and Uncle Chaim with his wife and son arrived with my brother. We spent the rest of the day talking about what we should do.

I did not want to speak to anyone. Long afterwards, my mother told me that I acted as if I was in shock. I did not speak. I stayed glued to my mother's side. Even my brother could not pull me away from her. All of the family's conversations drifted over my head. I did not listen. I kept thinking of what had occurred before. I understood nothing. I had known policemen as friendly people who came for fittings and always brought me a lollipop. Why did they take my father away? Later we found out he had been denounced by a neighbor as a Jew who was still

working and earning money.

Over the next couple of weeks my mother tried to find out where my father had been sent. We learned he was at Drancy, a detention camp originally built for cheap housing. It contained high towers and smaller buildings of raw concrete without water or heat. It had been left uncompleted but had been used as a prison by the French until the Germans took it over for their own purposes. Later it was named “Dancy-la-Juive.” It became one of the centers for the deportations of Jews from all over France.

The camp was managed by the French police under the control of the Gestapo. It had high fences all around the buildings with a large police force standing by with guns at the ready.

We were not the only family standing there at Drancy looking up at the small buildings which had high windows with small balconies from which the prisoners looked out. There was jostling to get a better view. There were many men hanging out from those windows and it was difficult to recognize anyone.

We finally saw my father. He was on the third or fourth floor. It was hard to see him, especially with my eyes misting with tears. He was wearing his maroon coat, his white silk scarf flying in the breeze—my father, the dandy, even there.

His whitish hair with his white silk scarf set him apart from the others. He was waving to the crowd milling around, perhaps hoping that his family was there. Did he see us? All the men hanging from the windows were waving and yelling. I don't know if he even saw us in the crowd pressed around the fences.

But we saw him, and at that time he was still alive and we all felt a little better. We thought we would be hearing from him soon. All three of us were shouting and waving our

arms, hoping that he might see at least one of us. Then the police started to fire their guns at the men in the windows, and we saw them quickly disappearing inside. The windows were shut.

The crowd, many crying, dispersed. We walked toward the train station. I was holding my mother's hand and kept on turning back towards the camp. But there was nothing to see. I asked my mother about the scene we had just witnessed, but she did not answer. She was very quiet and sad. So I walked holding my mother's hand and did not say a word.

It was the last time we saw him, a vague shadow, waving his arms, and I will never know if he saw us that day. Did he at least take with him a final picture of his family standing in that mass of people?

We still hoped that he would return and that his arrest was a mistake.

After the war my mother decided that somehow my father had survived and that he would come back eventually. She waited for him until she died in 1960.

But he is the powder that covers the fields around Auschwitz.

We learned that a neighbor of ours had denounced my father to the French police. He apparently slipped a note with the name and exact address of my family to the arresting French police right there on our street.

My brother, bent on revenge, went looking for him despite my mother's admonition not to do anything. It would change nothing and he would get in trouble. We learned that the informant had died very early in the war.

From Drancy my father was shipped to Compiègne, another holding camp, and from there to Auschwitz. All the Renault buses were requisitioned for the transport of Jews.

Later, after my father was taken, I remember my mother saying, "No one, not one person,

raised a voice in our defense. No one tried to stop the buses filled with Jews. No one questioned why and where they were all going.”

After the Germans occupied France, a small portion in Southern France called the “Free Zone” was placed under the control of a puppet regime with headquarters in Vichy headed by a prominent French World War One hero: Marechal Henry Philippe Petain. He agreed to cooperate with the Nazis for a semblance of self-rule and the promise to have the French prisoners of war repatriated.

The Gestapo, with the widespread collaboration of the French population, openly controlled the country. This meant that every Jew had to find a way out of France, and, if they could not leave, they had to run to the south. We had already heard about concentration camps, but no one really knew the full implication, the dark reality, of what they were.

Pierre Laval, a rabid Anti-Semite and a collaborator, was now the head of the newly constituted government. The Germans ordered him to supply fifty thousand workers for slave labor in German factories. He replied: “Why only fifty thousand? We can easily supply one hundred and fifty-thousand Jews.”

The seat of government was situated in the little town of Vichy, some 300 kilometers from Paris. Laval and his cronies refused to let any Jewish children leave France even when other countries offered visas. Five thousand Jewish children were supposed to go to the United States from France. The Quakers and other groups were planning to place them in American homes. They only needed permission from the French to let them leave. Laval refused. Most of these Jewish children would not escape and were killed.

My father was gone, and soon my brother would be gone. One of my father's clients, a policeman, came to see my mother and told her to leave immediately. My mother knew it was time.

It was 1942 and I was nine years old.

Chapter Three: Hiding

My mother had come back from one of her errands and told me that she had just gotten a tip from a friend in the police. The Germans and the French militia were going to conduct a round-up in the neighborhood. Our street was on their route. They would arrest all the Jews, adults and children.

We would have to hide. She was going to talk with the landlord and find out if there was a safe place to hide in one of his buildings. It had to be immediately; the raid was scheduled for that night. Before going to see the landlord, my mother hurried to warn a family of four, two parents and their two children my age, on the third floor of the impending raid.

I was to prepare food, water and warm clothing for the night ahead. I understood very little; all I knew was it had to do with hiding from some people for some reason I did not understand.

My mother was gone for about two hours. I packed everything, still wondering why we had to hide. Were we hiding from the same men in black who took my father away a few weeks earlier and soon after, my brother? Were they after my mother and myself? Had we done something wrong?

I looked outside at my street, busy with people. What was going on? My mother came back with good news. We were allowed to stay in the back building in one of the maid's rooms under the roof on the sixth floor. It was empty and no one would know. She also told me that the family on the third floor refused to listen to her warnings, insisting that she was wrong and

nothing bad would happen. My mother was anxious and wanted to leave the apartment immediately. “Why?” I asked. “Because,” she explains again, “the round-ups are scheduled for today and they could start at any minute.” What was a round-up? I asked her. My mother said to hurry and that she would explain later.

We took the food, water and clothing and crossed the courtyard separating the two buildings. It was getting dark; my mother had waited for the sunset so no one would see us. If we were spotted it would be very dangerous not only for us but for our landlord. We climbed silently to the sixth floor, stopping on every floor to push the light switch on so we could find our way up the next flight of stairs.

We found the small, forlorn room, which had one porthole of a window, one cot, a naked light bulb hanging from the ceiling. Dust balls flew around as we entered, disturbing the air. The toilet was in the courtyard, six flights down. My mother had brought a chamber pot with us; we would not go down again.

We shut the light off and went to the window looking down on the yard. We could see the first floor and our bedroom and kitchen windows on the opposite side. We moved the cot near the small window, sat down and waited. The sky darkened; the courtyard was unlit. My mother gave me a piece of cheese and a chunk of baguette. She did not eat. She listened for any noise. We were silent. I wanted to ask her some questions, but looking at her frozen face I knew better than to ask. I kept gazing at her, trying to get some clue from her expression. Her forehead was lined with deep furrows. She was biting her lips. I was silent. She noticed that I was watching her and told me to go to sleep.

I finally dozed off and was awakened by a loud commotion. Many car doors slammed in

the street and raucous voices shouted orders. Then a clatter of boots stomped up the stairs to the first floor apartment—our apartment.

There were thunderous knocks on the door which reverberated throughout the building. I remembered the same knocks on the door the day the men came to take my father. I was very scared. We both got up from the cot to crunch ourselves against the back wall inside our little room. Then my mother moved like a phantom to stand at the window, motioning me to stay where I was. I was afraid to stay so far from my mother and I moved near her in an instant. She clamped her hand on my mouth and whispered between clenched teeth, “Not a sound from you.” We dropped to our knees, eyes barely at the window-sill level. We could see and hear what was happening.

We heard the sharp knocks against the door. When there was no answer the men broke the lock and barged inside. We heard shrill words in a strange language: “RAOUS JUDEN.” There was a sprinkling of French voices as well. Lights suddenly illuminated the dark windows. We saw shadows darting in and out of the bedroom and the kitchen. One of the soldiers opened the bedroom window to look outside. My mother again clasped her hands over my mouth. The courtyard was dark; the sky was lit with stars and the moon was shining. Not a soul stirred.

The soldier slammed the window shut. After ransacking the apartment they departed. I wanted to ask my mother: what were they looking for? But I was afraid to speak. Her face was white and her lips just a line. The soldiers left a seal on the door so no one could get back in.

The rumbling of the marching boots continued. We were glued to the window. I was plastered against my mother. I did not understand: a few weeks ago the same soldiers had given me chocolate in the street. What had changed? My throat was tight with fear; I could barely

swallow. I understood nothing: why they broke down our door, why they were yelling. What did they want? Where were all the neighbors?

The boots stopped on the third floor, where the family my mother had warned lived. Same scenario, loud knocks on the door, harsh yells. The family had not left. They opened the door and were overtaken by the ferocious soldiers. At last the hunters had found their quarry. We heard crying and pleading. The mother, father and two children under the age of ten were beaten and taken forcibly downstairs by their captors.

Since their apartment was above ours and on the same side of the building, we could see everything. Those people were my mother's friends and their children were my playmates. Now the lights were shut off and the loud noises had subsided. The rumble of the marching boots came from a distance. It became eerily silent. We could not see what was happening in the street on the other side of our building. We heard car doors being noisily slammed and cars starting up. Then it became completely quiet. No one in that building had made a sound. It seemed as if no one lived there anymore, that we were the only people alive in that place which I had called home. I kept asking myself the same question: "Where is everybody?" No one had come to find out what had just happened. Not a window was opened. Only silence, dead silence. The moon was even brighter but the house was dark and silent.

My mother sat down on the cot, her head between her hands, her body slumped over as if she could not sit up straight anymore. I sat near her. I needed her warmth and support. I did not speak. I was trying to understand. These men who had been nice to me, who made remarks about how cute I was to my mother just came and brutally took my father away and they took

countless other people away as well.

My mother told me to go back to sleep. I lay down near her on the cot and slept fitfully. She did not move. Every time I opened my eyes to check on her, I saw her sitting in the same position on the edge of the cot, covering her eyes with one hand and holding her head with the other.

We stayed in that little room for the rest of the night. Morning arrived and with the first ray of sunshine my mother started to move: “We have to leave right away,” she said. “I don't want anyone to see us. Let's go.” We ran silently down the six flights of stairs and managed to get back into our apartment. My mother unglued the seal on the door and we went in. The place was a mess. Closets had been ransacked and everything thrown on the floor. The papers and few pictures my parents had of the family in the old country were torn up in little pieces and unsalvageable. My father's workroom was in chaos. My mother did not stop to look. She found a few important papers: her ID card and some money that the soldiers had not discovered. They had been too busy destroying to look for details. She also found her package of silverware where had hidden it: of all places, inside the toilet room behind a curtain and cleaning materials. She had prepared the silver earlier. She had told me if we needed to flee, and the silverware would be our ransom money in case we needed it. I did not know what “ransom” meant. My mother resealed the door when we left so it did not look tampered with.

We took some food and very little clothing for our journey. We had to travel light. My mother carried the silverware. I carried the food and a bundle of clothing.

We took a number of different buses to get out of Paris. For a while we merged with the crowds of people going to work early in the morning. I understood so little, but I was with my

mother and felt safe.

And so we left Paris.

My mother had friends who had escaped from Paris at the beginning of the invasion and lived in the Free Zone of Grenoble in the South of France. They told my mother to come and stay with them if she needed to escape.

Chapter Four: Decent Men

We left at night. We carried few possessions, family heirlooms from Poland, the old country the silverware. It was real silver, the only object of value which could save us. We could exchange money for our lives. I did not know at the time what the word “exchange” meant, and when I asked my mother she would not explain. Later she told me the silverware was a gift from the family for her wedding to my father. It was worth a lot of money, she said. This would be our ransom money. I did not know what “ransom money” was.

We walked through Paris, a Paris without light. We went to the railroad station. After the night-long train ride, we had to take a bus. We took different buses to get out of Paris. We blended in with the crowds of people going to work early in the morning. We did not want to attract attention: a woman and child traveling alone in a time of war. Did I understand the rules of the game my mother was playing? No, I just went along. After all, I was with her and I felt protected. We climbed aboard another bus and sat down silently.

The bus came to a stop. The door opened and two German soldiers appeared. They were checking the papers of all the passengers. I felt my mother tense up, her body rigid. She held her hand on my arm and the fingers of that hand gripped me so hard I almost cried out. As the soldiers came closer she whispered to me not to move and not to speak.

They stood right in front of us, tall, unsmiling, their hands on their guns. “Papieren,” they barked. My mother looked at them and took out the identity card with her picture and the word “Jew” stamped in large black letters across her face.

“Out you two, right now,” they said.

With their guns drawn, the soldiers pushed us out of the bus. The passengers sat silently, averting their gaze.

On the way out, the bus driver softly asked my mother what he should do with her luggage. She whispered to him to hold on to it and added, "If we ever get to our destination, we will pick it up there, and I will reward you." He said, "I will leave it at the next bus station in case you escape."

The German soldiers took us into a small office inside a house they were using as Gestapo headquarters. We stood near the door, waiting for further instructions. My mother's face had changed color to a mixture of gray and white, lips pursed together, her brown eyes hard as stones, hands clasped together with such force that the knuckles bunched out of their sockets. She held her head high, without moving. I hung on to her arm, mute with fright. Standing close to her, I could feel her trembling.

They left the room. We stood a long time in that bleak room. No windows, no chairs, white-washed walls, only one light bulb hanging from the ceiling. It felt like a prison cell.

Finally the door opened again and they told us to come in. My mother took me by the hand as we entered the next room. Papers were stacked on files and the two German officers sat behind a desk. They told us to sit down on the two chairs on the side of the desk. They were speaking to each other in German. My mother did not let on that she understood every word, and I understood much of it, since their language sounded so much like the Yiddish I knew. "Search them," said the one on the left, a horsewhip in his hands. "Maybe they have some money or jewelry. Then let's get rid of them, the dirty Jews." I burrowed my hand inside my mother's. The other officer said, "No, search the woman, not the child. We are not here to search

children.”

A guard took my mother into the other room, and a woman in uniform went in with her. My mother told me later that she had to undress completely, stand naked under the light while she was poked and touched in different parts of her body. They found nothing.

Meanwhile, I was sitting in the office by myself, poised on the edge of the chair. My hands were locked inside my knees. I felt my body tremble. I wondered what was happening. What did it all mean? What did “search” mean? The word kept turning around in my head. I knew what it meant to search for misplaced keys and other lost items, but how did the word apply to my mother? Where was my mother? I wanted my mother.

I kept silent. My mother had told me not to say a word. Finally she came back and sat on the chair near me, her hand touching me gently, reassuring me. I wanted to know what had happened inside that room. I looked up at her face and she had her “do not ask” mask on.

We seemed to sit for hours. No water or food was given to us. It must have been early in the day since we had traveled by train and by bus in the early morning. We had not eaten since the night before.

Now a heated discussion was going on between the two men sitting behind the desk. The one holding the horsewhip said, “Send them to the camp immediately. Get a car, a driver, and take them to the nearest departure station.” He punctuated each word with a thump on the desk with his whip. The other man said, “But it's only a woman and a child. What difference will it make in the long range of things if we send two more? Let them go; we do not need these two....” He suddenly stopped talking in the middle of the sentence and stood up looking at us.

My mother sat on the edge of her chair, holding my hand. Her hands were dry and

shaking, but she held on firmly. What was a camp, I thought. Why did he not finish his sentence? Why were we here?

Time passed slowly. The officers left the room together, still arguing. After what seemed a long time, they came back, sat down behind the desk and gazed at us. We had not moved.

We sat, awaiting our fate. The officers still sat looking at us. After a few more angry words in German, the officer with the whip stood up, violently heaved his whip on the desk, turned towards the door and walked out, the heels of his black boots beating against the floor. The other officer sat there, his hands gripping the arms of his chair, his head turned towards the door, watching his partner storm out. The door slammed noisily behind the departing officer. The second officer turned around to look at us, the tension leaving his body. He smiled.

We heard the beating of the rain in the silence. We gazed at the window. A downpour of water, an iron curtain of rain, blocked the view. We were afraid to move. The officer stood up, walking slowly toward us. He stopped in front of my mother. I looked up at him, a tall, blond, blue-eyed man in a green uniform, standing there in his black-legged boots. He bent forward a little and said in halting French, "It is all right, you are safe and free to go. I will call and reserve a seat on the next bus." Then he patted me on the head and stood aside.

My mother got up very slowly, afraid of making any move that would upset the balance. She took my hand, walked to the door, turned around and said, "If we survive, we will remember you. Thank you."

We stood outside in the pouring rain. We were getting drenched while standing in front of the office. The officer came out with our identity papers and said, "The bus will be here in a

couple of hours. It is raining very hard; you are welcome to wait inside.” My mother looked at him and with a tiny smile on her lips, she said, “No, thank you. We will stay here and wait for our bus.” He looked at us for a few seconds, shook his head and went back inside his office.

We were drenched, but the bus came on time. And at the next bus stop, my mother went down to check at the ticket office if there was a package for her. The man behind the window got up, went to the back of the office and came back with a package. For the first time my mother smiled. The package of silverware and the small bundle of clothing were untouched. There was a note attached to it:” I hope to God” the bus driver had written that you will be able to pick this up by yourselves. That means you are alive and well. Good luck, God blesses.” It was signed: One decent man.” My mother thanked the man and told him to say thank you to the driver. Later she told me she left a silver spoon and a fork for each. For being decent men.

Grenoble, the capital of the Alps, was situated at the foot of the Alps, southwest of Chambéry in the Rhones Alpers region. The city was under Italian occupation from 1942 to 1943, and the Italians' mercy and sympathy toward the Jews resulted in an increase in the Jewish population in the Free Zone.

We were going to Grenoble because my mother had friends there. They had fled Paris at the start of the roundups. They had an apartment in this beautiful town and it was safe. They had told my mother that if she needed to run away, to come to Grenoble and stay with them.

We were on our way. But first we had to pass through the NoNo line.

Chapter Five: The “No-No” Line

We kept on running. With the demarcation line suddenly closed on both sides, escaping Jews could only travel illegally. Sometimes I still thought perhaps this was a game we were playing of hide-and-seek. But I didn't really believe that. My mother was not smiling and she was silent. I understood much later that her primary concern was to stay one step ahead of the French police or the Germans and escape from Paris as quickly as we could without seeming too obvious. She would say that we now had two enemies to run from. She pointed at the Germans and then to the French militia. She said we had to hide from them and get as far away from them as we could. She held on for dear life to her silver package, the forks, spoons and silver utensils she had brought with her from the old country. It meant possible survival or death.

I tried to figure it out. I had thought that I was French from my earliest memories. I always liked the gendarmes with their blue capes. They looked like birds and we called them the “hirondelles” (swallows).

We slept wherever we could in the clothes we were wearing. Sometimes, after arriving in a train station, my mother would leave me in the waiting room with strict orders not to move from that spot until she came back.

She left carrying the package of silver, and I had no idea what she was doing. Now I realize she was desperately trying to arrange our escape, trying to find a guide she could bribe who could help us get to the other side, to the free Zone.

I remember being on a deserted road with other people with nothing in their hands, no luggage—only the clothes on their back and their valuables hidden on their bodies. My mother

could not hide the silver on her body or mine, so she held on to it as ferociously as she held on to me. It was late in the day and the sky was darkening. Walking in silence behind my mother in a single file, I held on to her dress. Now I know what we were doing. We were about to pass from the occupied zone to the unoccupied side of France, not yet overrun by the Germans, through the famous “No no” line, (meaning “nonoccupied”). My mother had paid off the “passeur” (the guide, usually a non-Jew who could be bribed to help Jews) with some of the silver. These people knew of a variety of alternative routes to the other side. Sometimes they would be denounced, and the Jews who waited anxiously for them to show up were confronted instead by a German detachment or French gendarmes. Both the guides and the Jews were arrested and sent to death camps. On both sides of the lines we were in danger of being picked up by the Germans or the French.

We stopped to rest at some point, hiding low behind bushes and clumps of trees, fearful of being discovered. We were as silent as shadows. There were people hiding beside us. I was the only child in that group of ragged and terrified people. The “passeur” told us to rest before embarking on the last leg of the trip, the passage across the line. He emphasized the danger: we had to be fast and silent and obey his directives.

We stayed hidden in the bushes and suddenly we heard the noise of boots hitting the road some distance away. My mother was livid: “They’re coming so close to the line,” she murmured between clenched teeth. I wanted to ask her who was “they” but she told me to be quiet. We were all petrified with fear. The guide was nervous. He said in a low voice, “We have to distract them, they are coming our way.” He was, of course, afraid that if he were caught he would suffer the same fate as us.

His eyes fell on me. He pointed at me and told my mother, “She is our only hope. She must go into the road and stand where the Germans or the militia will pass by and see her.” My mother asked why, but she knew the reason. German soldiers always gave me chocolate and tweaked my cheeks in Paris. The “passeur” said brusquely, “You know why. Your daughter is blond with long braids and blue eyes. She looks like them. You must let her do this; otherwise we are doomed—all of us—and you know where we will wind up.” The words hung in the air. The group looked at me and my mother. The silence was thick. No one breathed. My mother looked at me and looked at the group. No one said a word. They were all staring at me. I had no idea what was going on, even though I heard the conversation. I just heard the boots stamping on the road. Taking my hand, my mother said, “As much as I do not want you to do this, you must go and stand by the road, pick some flowers and when the soldiers pass and perhaps talk to you, you must smile and give them a few flowers. Remember Paris? The soldiers gave you chocolate. Do not be afraid. We are all here, hiding behind the bushes, and no matter what happens we will be together. Can you do this without looking in our direction? You must not turn toward us. You have to forget that we are here. You must make sure that they look only at you when they are marching by. A squad of soldiers usually does not stop on their march; they will look at you and continue on their way.”

The guide reminded her to tell me that if I was asked what I was doing there alone on the road. I was to tell the soldiers that I lived in the small village around the corner of the road in one of the stone houses nestling near a church. I looked at my mother and shook my head, “Yes.”

Did I know or understand what I was about to do? I do not think so. Now, in

remembering, I get little snapshots of different memories. I remember that the famous line was no more than some bushes and high trees, long grass and flowers. Our group was very quiet; we filed through the bushes like phantoms following the “passeur” at the head. I thought of it as a game. I would play on the road while everybody would hide. I would smile to the soldiers and not say a word. It was like playing hide-and-seek.

It was getting darker; the sun was slowly going down on the horizon. Time was at a standstill. The group and my mother and the “passeur” disappeared behind high bushes. A small detachment of German soldiers appeared, about twenty men. They were marching, not looking left or right. The officer in charge looked at me while marching. He smiled and said to the men behind him: “Halt.” They all stopped. He came over to me, pulled on my braids gently, pinched my cheeks and said “Shon maidel” [“Pretty young girl”] or something to that effect. It sounded like the Yiddish my mother spoke. But I knew not to answer. I gave him a smile and the flowers I had gathered. He took the flowers and put them in the front pocket of his jacket. Then he pinched my cheeks. The soldiers left with a smile on their faces. I kept picking flowers until the harsh sound of the pounding boots was gone and the soldiers vanished behind the next bend in the road. My mother emerged from the bushes with the others. She gave me a big kiss and the others slapped me heartily on my shoulders. Everyone was smiling, even the dour-faced “passeur.”

My mother said that perhaps after the war I could become an actress, perhaps a new Sarah Bernhardt or Greta Garbo, like my namesake. I knew that my mother loved the movies; she was always going to the cinema before the war.

Now I wanted to pick more flowers and I was slowing down the silent march. My

mother was not amused anymore. She was not smiling. She pulled me quite roughly along with her, whispering, "The game is over. We're not playing anymore. Come along and be quiet."

Thinking of it many years later, wondering if what I did was courageous or purely innocent, I think it was simply innocence. I did not know or understand what I was up against. My mother told me what to do, and I did it.

And what was my mother thinking while watching her little daughter? Asked once about that incident, my mother replied, "What were the alternatives? The armed Nazis were coming toward us. The guide's idea was a way of possibly tricking them and surviving. It was a matter of life or death. So I decided to chance it."

My mother always trusted her instincts and she was a resilient person. I never saw her paralyzed by fear. She made her decisions on the spot, spontaneously, and acted upon them immediately, while others debated.

The demarcation line was dangerous, difficult to cross illegally. But it was the only way to get to the unoccupied zone of France, where we might be able to stay out of harm's way for a while. Or so my mother thought.

I always wondered how my mother Shaindele managed to navigate, how she found the right people to see and to bribe in order to buy our freedom.

We finally reached the other side. We were all exhausted from the strain of the last few hours. Our group of disheveled, exhausted people collapsed on the grass. We needed to sleep even more than to eat. It was dark and we did not know where to go.

The guide was gone after collecting his money and some pieces of silverware, and we

were left alone. My mother wanted to leave the group. She thought that it would be easier to escape attention if everyone went their own way. Although we were in the non-occupied zone, she knew we had plenty of enemies. We could be reported to the police, and placed in a camp for displaced persons.

We started to walk away from the group after saying our goodbyes. We walked through fields and bushy trees at a quick pace. We walked silently, the grass under our feet absorbing the noise of our footfalls. It was quiet and dark. The moon was shining above our heads. The silence of the night was all around us, protecting us like a blanket.

My mother suddenly stopped walking, sat down on the dirt road, and pulled me down. "Let's rest a bit," she said. "I don't know which way to go yet. Let me think." She put her head on her knees. I was resting against her body. I was warm and unafraid; I was with my mother. She would know what to do; she always did. I waited.

She finally stood up. "We must find some kind of shelter," she said. "We cannot keep going like this. Let's walk in that direction." She pulled me to my feet and, holding my hand firmly, started to walk with me. She took a right turn into a new dirt road. To me the new road looked exactly the same as the old one. But my mother was sure that we would find shelter at the end of that road. I wondered how she knew.

We arrived in front of a low-slung building. She stopped in front of the wooden doors and gave them a push. They slowly opened. She went in first, cautiously. I hid behind her. It was a barn, empty with straw on the ground and piles of sackcloth. Everything was still. She paused for a minute and went in. It was dark and silent.

We sat down on the straw near the door. We munched on a piece of dry bread she took

from her pocket and an apple. The moisture of the fruit helped slake our thirst. My mother spread out some of the sacks on the straw to make a bed and told me to go to sleep. I was so tired and fell asleep instantly. Later, something woke me up. My mother was hitting me with her bag. I protected myself with my hands, wondering what she was doing.

This was the most frightening moment of my life, even more than the encounter with the Nazi soldiers. While hitting me with her bag, she told me that while dozing off she felt something running over her body. She did not move and the running became more persistent, and it came from all sides. She sat up quickly, shook herself, and saw the biggest rats she'd ever seen. She was unafraid. She violently swung her bag left and right, hitting me in the process. This was what she was doing when she woke me up. The rest of the night was consumed in fighting the rats. We left the barn as soon as daylight appeared.

I will always remember that night. I still see in my mind, after all these years, my mother twirling her bag to keep the rats at bay. My mother, the hero.

Where were we going? I knew better than to ask my mother this question as we walked away from the barn. My mother always seemed to know. Holding my hand and with the other holding her silver package, she walked resolutely ahead until we found a train station.

We boarded a train, and then several busses. This part of the journey is quite vague to me now. I don't remember the name of the little town or the name of the train station. After the terrible time we'd had in passing the NoNo line, my mother wanted to get away as quickly as we could. She just wanted to get to Grenoble, the capital of the Alps, which was under Italian occupation. The Italians did not attack the Jews. She knew of a friendly family. They had told us to come if things got rough in Paris. Then we would try to reach Megeve, where her brother

Chaim and his wife and son lived, and arrange a passage into Switzerland. “Your brother Bernard knows where we are,” my mother told me, “and if he can, he will join us. And we will be able to live without fear until the end of the war.”

I continued to be in awe of my mother. She had made all these arrangements in advance.

We had no idea what was awaiting us in Megeve.

Chapter Six: Grenoble

We arrived without further problems in the bus station inside the city of Grenoble. My mother told me to sit on a bench inside the deserted station. She left me with the bag of clothing with strict orders not to move until she returned. She took the silver package with her. It was very important; I had seen her pay for our safe passage from one place to the next with a few silver pieces.

There was a small canteen where my mother brought a sandwich which she broke in two, and a bottle of water. She left after having taken a single drink from the bottle. She was in a hurry. She was going to see if our friends were still at the address they had given her before they left. She moved quickly through the door and disappeared in the street outside.

The canteen had closed, and I sat alone, except for the man behind the ticket window who was reading a paper. The clock on the wall was not working. I had no idea of the time and no one to ask. I felt very alone. Would my mother come back? If she didn't, what would I do? Would the man behind the ticket window help me? He had fallen asleep. The newspaper he had been reading had fallen on his head and his loud snores were the only sound in the waiting room. The daylight was slowly fading, and I was afraid of the silence and the emptiness around me. The clerk woke up, folded his paper without looking at me, closed the window and disappeared. My feet were planted firmly on the bag. I did not move; I felt rooted to the floor. Then I saw my mother coming toward me.

She was walking slowly, as if she was carrying a heavy load on her back, slightly hunched forward. Her face looked frozen, her mouth pursed into a thin line. She was not smiling. She seemed to collapse on the bench near me, put her hand on my face and sat there in a depth of misery I could not understand. She did not say one word.

She stood up slowly as if she was carrying the weight of the whole world on her shoulders. She held the package of silver with one hand and my hand with the other and we started to walk. She told me not to talk and not to ask questions. It was dangerous, she said, and I silently wondered why.

My mother held my hand tightly; we walked through a city we did not know. She must have found out the way from the bus station to the train station because we arrived there after a while. We went inside the waiting room, which was almost empty. She told me to sit down on a bench, and put the package of silver under my feet and told me not to move. She went to the ticket window and purchased tickets. To where? I did not know. Only later I realized she did not know herself where to go. She only knew we had to get away from Grenoble. These were her first words to me when she returned from buying the tickets to nowhere. Later I learned that the Germans were on the way. The French were aware of the imminent occupation and had begun to round up Jews.

We sat on the bench for a while in silence, and then my mother began to talk in a low voice. She told me that when she left me in the bus station, she had gone to the address her friends had given her before they left Paris. It was supposed to be a safe house, purchased before the war. "I went to the address," my mother said, "but didn't go in immediately. Instead I decided to have coffee in the cafe across from their building.

“I sat down near a window. While I was drinking, from the corner of my eyes I spotted a black car cruising along the street. My instinct told me not to go up to the apartment, and I remained in the cafe. The black car finally stopped in front of their building. The doors from the car opened on the other side. I waited to see what would happen.

“The waiter went to the door to peer outside, and casually said to someone standing on the street, ‘Alors, ils arretent des Juifs’ (‘So, they are arresting the Jews.’) I melted into my seat.

Then I saw them: the whole family, father, mother and three children coming down the front stairs of the house. They were herded off by two men in black with guns in their hands. All five of them were pushed inside the car and the doors were closed. The black car disappeared around the corner of the street. That was it. They have just ceased to exist, like your father. I paid for my coffee and walked back to you.”

I looked at my mother, sitting there with a look of utter defeat on her face. I did not really comprehend what she had just told me. I heard the words, but they did not register. Why had they just ceased to exist like my father? I remembered what my father had said before he left with the men in black: “They are good men. People are good. Nothing is going to happen to me, and I will be back.”

We waited for a train to come and take us away from Grenoble. My mother had thought that Grenoble would be our final destination, safe from the Germans and the French police, but our journey was only beginning. After a few changes of train, my mother finally told me where we were headed in the hope of avoiding the German squads. We were going to Megeve, where my uncle, my mother's brother, had apparently arranged for all of us—if we could get there—to

pass into Switzerland. The frontier was not far and we could get to Switzerland by walking over the mountains.

Chapter Seven: Ardeche

After the fiasco in Grenoble, my mother went to the train ticket office and bought two tickets. Any train, she told me, out of here. We were lucky; no one asked for our papers, the ID card (“carte d’identite”) with the word Jew stamped on the picture. We had a police pass issued by the French police authorizing her to travel with her daughter, but every time we had to show the papers, we were afraid of someone detaining us.

We stayed on the train until the last stop. We needed to prolong our stay in a small town before starting to run again, as my mother did not know exactly when my uncle would be arriving in Megeve. We got off the train and found a small village clustered around the train station with one street. There were three or four small houses with smoke issuing from their chimneys. The street was covered with patches of snow, and it was deserted. It was the middle of the afternoon. We were cold and hungry. My mother was exhausted. We needed to stop, rest, and eat something warm. “Who will give us shelter, who will give us food?” my mother said between clenched teeth.

I looked at her and I was afraid; I did not recognize her voice. Her face was grim, her lips tight. She stood there rooted to the dirty road, not knowing where to turn. She had always known what to do. Now she stood there, disoriented by the new turn in what had been up to then a controlled escape. I slipped my hand into hers. Looking at her, I did not speak. I pressed against her. I was cold. So was she. We were not dressed for this frigid weather. She looked at me.

She took a gulp of air and started to walk. The sky was turning gray. A few flakes of snow flew around our faces and made us feel even colder. We walked past a few small buildings. Everything was closed. We kept on walking. It was better than standing still and freezing.

After a few minutes, we saw a small house at the end of the street, almost hidden by tall trees, smoke coming from its chimney. The windows in front of the house were lit. We approached slowly and quietly. Perhaps, we thought, there was a dog loose somewhere and it would wake the whole village with his barking. We stood on the side of the house, near the front door. My mother tried to peer inside a window but she could not see anything; there was a curtain blocking her view. She decided she had to knock on the door. It was getting colder and she could hear my teeth chattering. And we were so hungry.

She knocked on the wooden pane, very softly, as if she was afraid to make too much noise. There was no response. She knocked again, this time a little harder. Nothing moved. It was totally silent. Standing close to the door, we could smell food. My stomach growled. I was famished.

My mother knocked again. She could not give up. We knew there was someone inside. There was nowhere else to go.

The door suddenly opened a crack. We saw an old woman peering at us. She held the door at an angle so that we could not see or be seen from the inside. The smell of the food was intoxicating. I almost fainted. The old woman looked down at us. She opened the door a little wider. I got a whiff of hot air and a smell of soup. I almost lost my grip on my mother and the old woman grabbed my arm and pulled me inside. My mother followed.

The woman looked at us. We were dirty and disheveled. We could barely speak. She shook her head and led us toward the table. She told us to sit down and eat before we tried to talk. She placed bowls of steaming soup before us with large chunks of bread. My mother started to speak, but the old woman put her finger on her lips and said softly, "It is better to keep quiet so the old man upstairs does not hear anything. He is sleeping."

We ate. The food was warm and delicious. The old woman spoke in a low voice: "You cannot stay here; everyone in the hamlet knows each other and they know we don't have any family. We have a small cabin at the foot of the mountain; I will take you there at sundown so no one will see us. I will provide you with whatever food and water I can get without being conspicuous. Don't expect too much. You will have to get some wood from the forest to warm the cabin and reheat food in the fireplace. The toilet is the mountain behind the cabin and the snow is your washing water. That is all I can do without being noticed. If anyone sees smoke coming from the chimney, they will think it is the old man hunting. He sometimes uses the cabin to hunt, but don't worry; he is sick and bedridden; he will not venture out for a while. If something changes and you have to leave, I will let you know. I will not come to see you but I will send you an emissary every other day with food and water. He will have a note if there are any problems."

That was a long speech which I had to translate and my mother wanted to thank her. But the old woman murmured: "I know, I listen to the radio and there is no need to thank me. It is a shame what is happening. I think it is only normal to help a person in need."

The cabin was in the forest in the Ardeche section of France. It was a mountainous region covered with snow and a deep forest of pine trees that reached to the sky. It was a

wooden shack built of planks and a roof made out of tree bark. It was cold and the snow was coming through the roof. My mother looked around and shook her head. It was going to be a real challenge to keep dry and warm, but she was so resourceful and she would find a way to keep us warm and safe. She went to find branches in the nearby forest while I waited.

There was only one cot with a used blanket and what looked like a table. It was a long piece of wood atop cut tree trunks. She pushed the small bed under the table. We were protected by it from the cold and the snow. She lit a small fire in the chimney and the small room warmed up.

A very big dog came to visit us everyday with a small container filled with food attached under his neck. Even now I can still picture him coming up the mountain, wagging his tail, not barking. I learned later that he was a Saint Bernard. My mother was leery of him, as she was afraid of dogs in general. She kept a safe distance from him. I retrieved the food from the container under his neck.

He had long hairs and was a mixture of black and brown. He had big, soft brown eyes and was always ready to lick my face. After he brought the food, we would play together in the snow outside the cabin. After our departure from Paris, I no longer had friends. He was my newfound friend. I sat on his back and he would take me on a walk around the cabin. We rolled in the snow. My mother was a little fearful, but he was so gentle and I was overjoyed to have a four-legged friend. I played with him every day for hours. I called him simply "Dog," and he always answered with a low bark when I called him. When he did not show up I was sad.

I have happy memories from that time, probably because of the dog. I did not have one friend in those dark days, no brother to play with, any father, family or cousin. My mother was

always sad and devising new ways to run ahead of the Nazis or the French police. I knew I had to keep quiet. When I played with the dog, I played like a small child. When I ran around the cabin with him, I forgot for a while what we were doing in that forsaken little village, and in that small cabin.

The weather was turning very cold. I remember the nights, with animals crashing against the wooden walls of the cabin. We could also hear howling from deep in the forest. I was warm and cozy near my mother. I was not afraid. We wore all our clothes to bed.

I do not know if my mother slept during our nights in the cabin. The silver package was always under her head. Whenever a noise would wake me up, she would comfort me and quiet me down.

In the morning, if snow had fallen, we could see the footprints of animals.

It was the beginning of fall. The trees were beautiful; the weather was mild. Some days it snowed a little; the next day the ground froze. Then a ray of sunshine would thaw some of the snow. The nights were cold. We could get by in the days. My mother was fretting; she wanted to leave before the real winter weather set in. In those parts the winter was tough; we could not survive in the cabin. We would certainly freeze to death. I knew that she was thinking about leaving.

We never saw the old woman again. I do not remember how long we stayed there; perhaps a few months. She took care of us without ever coming to see us once. All communications were done through the dog. The old woman wrote little notes to my mother which I read to her, giving her news of the outside world. And the food and water kept coming.

We never asked for anything, but the woman knew exactly what to send. We were not hungry.

We were a little cold on some nights, but we survived.

It was like an adventure for me, but when I looked at my mother's anxious, pinched face, I kept still. But while I was waiting for the dog to arrive, I would run around and roll in the snow. When he arrived, I would climb on his back and, like a pony, he would walk me around the cabin.

Then one day my mother decided that it was time to go. The weather had gotten very cold and the snow had fallen heavily. She knew we could not stay much longer and thought it was time to try to get to Megeve.

When the dog arrived, I wrote a little note to the old woman, thanking her for her care and compassion, and telling her that we were leaving the next day and not to send the dog. My mother gave me a silver spoon for the old woman and I attached it to the dog's collar. I kissed him goodbye, folded the little note under his collar and watched him disappear from my life. I did not cry. I had already learned that tears had no effect on my life. I had learned to control my emotions. As my mother had said, "There is no time for tears when our life is at stake." I really did not know what "at stake" meant, but if my mother said it I had to conform to it.

We prepared a little bundle of food and water. We just had the clothes on our back, which my mother kept washing, and the package of silver. We closed the door of the cabin after dousing out the fire in the chimney and walked toward the train station. It was like walking in a ghost town. No one appeared, and all the shops were closed. The road was covered with a light coating of snow and the icicles were hanging on the trees. My mother walked quickly. We arrived at the train station and it was then that I learned that the name of that little village was

“La Louvesc.”

We took the first train out of the mountain toward Megeve. I do not recall how we got there; we took many trains, and we tried to blend in with all the other passengers. Somehow my mother managed to get on board each train without incident. We arrived in Megeve not knowing what was in store for us.

Chapter Eight: Megeve

I remember the day we arrived in Megeve, a pretty little town in Haute Savoie in the middle of the Alps, near the Swiss border.

We would have to go into Chamonix, which was closest to the border. The snowy mountains could pose a problem. We had to walk over them to get to the other side. I had my first taste of blueberries, so I imagine it was late spring and easier to walk.

I learned later that in late 1940 the Swiss Department of Justice and the border police issued an order that only women, children under 16, and men over 60 would be admitted to Switzerland.

In 1943, when we were in Megeve, a new order was issued: anyone who had fled because of their race--"Jews" for example, would not be allowed to enter. These people were not considered political refugees. The border police, however, were given some leeway in refusing or admitting Jews. My uncle had somehow managed to get into Switzerland with his wife and son for the duration of the war.

We were to meet with my uncle, his wife and baby, my cousin. My mother knew that my uncle had rented a place for his family. He had made arrangements before leaving Paris and he gave the address to my mother. We went straight there and were reunited with them. There was no news from my brother. We were going to wait a while for him. My uncle had rented a hotel room for us. We had dinner together. It was late and it was cold. My mother was edgy, waiting for her son to show up.

I was happy. I played with my little cousin, Michel, a pretty little child with blond hair and blue eyes like me. The adults spoke in low voices.

For me it was a little like the old days in Paris when the family had dinner together—except that my father, my brother and Aunt Esther were missing.

After dinner, we went back to the hotel room. My mother was nervous and paced around the small room, peering out the window at the street below, opening the door to look outside and then closing it softly. I went to sleep. In the middle of the night, some noise woke me up: a door opening and closing. Opening my eyes, I saw my brother. I started to jump on the bed for sheer joy, but he put a finger to his lips and told me to go back to sleep. He gave me a kiss and I fell asleep happy. My big beautiful brother, whom I had not seen in a while, was in the same room with us. Everything would be all right. Perhaps he had news about my father.

In the morning he was still there; it was not a dream. He told me that he had escaped from the work camp located near the Belgian frontier with a couple of friends and went straight to Megeve, hoping to find us there as we had planned. He told my mother that if he had not found us, he was going to join the underground to fight the Nazis.

We dressed and went to my uncle's apartment. We climbed up the stairs quietly. The silence was strange; normally we could hear the baby's chirping. There wasn't a sound. It was very early in the morning. My mother stopped at the door. She knocked softly, and then a little louder. My brother pushed in front of her and tried the door knob. The door opened wide. No one was there: there was no clothing and no food. The first room was empty. The second room with the baby's things was also empty.

My mother looked around. My brother sat down on the floor, holding his head and muttering. I went to the window and looked outside. The sun was just coming out. I could not understand why my uncle and his family weren't there. We were with them the night before, and I heard my mother and uncle talking about what we were going to do as soon as my brother showed up. So what had happened between then and this morning?

My brother said furiously, "They are gone and they left us...." He cut his sentence short. Many years later he told me that he had left out two words: "to die."

My mother erupted in a fury. I had never seen her so violent. She whirled around like a dervish, hitting the wall with her bare hands. She almost hit me by accident. She did not say a word. Her face was pinched; she bit her lips until they became bloody. She kept on staring at us. She collapsed on the bed, breathing hard. Her face turned from deathly pale to bright red. My brother got up and put a hand on her shoulder. They looked at each other and at me. I still looked out the window, hoping my uncle had perhaps gone for a walk with his family and they would reappear and all would be well.

I waited, looking at my brother's face. His skin was gray; he was pulling his cheeks. His scar stood out on his face. I did not know exactly what had happened, but knew it was related to my uncle having left without telling us, taking his wife and child with him.

I knew better than to ask questions. I had to wait quietly.

We returned to our hotel room. My mother ordered some food for us; I think that I was the only one who ate. They couldn't. My mother told me to go down to the hotel lobby and wait there. She had some things to take care of with my brother. She would pack our things because we were leaving soon. I went down to the lobby and looked at some magazines, waiting.

My brother came down. He sat beside me and told me that he was going away again, but he promised to come back. I would go on with my mother and she would take care of me. I did not fully understand. I asked him if he had heard from our father. He shook his head and said no. He gave me a big hug and kisses and walked out of my life once more.

I went back upstairs to my mother. She had already packed, and prepared the food we hadn't eaten, and water. We were leaving again. I asked her where my brother had gone, but she did not answer.

I wonder if she knew where to go. She must have discussed it with my brother. We did not seem to have any options. We left the room, my mother holding her package of silver under her arm, the little bundle of clothing with the same hand. She held my hand with her other hand. We started walking under a blue sky and a shining sun. Where were we going? We had to flee again. We took some busses and trains. My mother finally decided to head for the south of France, which was not yet occupied by the Germans. She decided on the city of Nice. She told me that in a big city a woman and a small child would be less noticed. No one accosted us on this journey. We finally arrived in Nice, a beautiful city with green leafy trees and flowers.

Chapter Nine: Nice

Nice was a large city in the South of France on the Mediterranean Sea. We had left the mountains and the cold for the sun and the warmth of the south. There were long stretches of stone, sandy beaches, palm trees and flowers. The parks were filled with flowers and benches, adults and children. I was 9 years old now.

The city was occupied by the Italians. Italy viewed the “Jewish problem” very differently from the Germans. While they had introduced racial laws at home, these laws never led to arrests or deportations of the Jewish population until the Nazis arrived. The Italian government, as I have mentioned before, maintained the same relatively benign policies in the French territories it occupied. The Jews were protected by the Italian administration, and things seemed benign under their supervision. This was why my mother had traveled through France toward the Italian-occupied zone.

“They do not chase or arrest Jews,” my mother often said. It was a mild occupation, without roundups. The Italian soldiers stood by in groups, watching people go by with a benevolent eye. They smiled at the pretty girls and at the children.

Arriving in a strange new place at dusk and not knowing where to go for the night, we felt disoriented. We stopped walking and sat on a bench in the middle of a beautiful square, resting. My mother found a piece of dry bread in her bag and a bottle of water. She looked around, one hand on me and the other holding the silver package. “It is so pretty here,” she said. I nodded my head. Tall green trees, blooming flowers, a sunset. I think it was winter, but in the South even the winter was not cold. Sitting on the bench, we could still feel the heat from the afternoon sun. I watched the birds and rested after the long hard trip.

“Stay here,” my mother said. “I’ll find out where we are and try to find a place for tonight.” My mother just walked to the edge of the garden, looked around, and came back. She did not want to leave me alone. We got up from the bench and started to walk together. We had to find a room. We crossed the park, which was called Square Massena. We crossed at the red light and found ourselves on a large and beautiful street, lined with trees, cafes, shops and people walking leisurely. We looked at the rental signs.

My mother suddenly stopped walking. She pointed to a small sign in a window. I read it for her. It said “Small room for rent, clean and cheap.” She rang the bell on the side of a massive wooden door. A curtain on a window moved. An old woman peered out from the window on the ground floor. My mother pointed at the sign and at us.

The door opened and the old lady let us in. She showed us a room in the back of her apartment, separated by a door. There was another door inside the room that opened onto a side street. We could come and go without being seen by anyone. My mother smiled and paid the rent for three months in advance. There were no questions asked.

The anonymity pleased my mother. She had a thick Yiddish accent and had a fear of speaking. I spoke for her at all times. She pretended she had a throat problem. That’s how we survived: a woman without a voice, and a small girl. My mother was determined to survive. She was always instructing me in Yiddish on how to behave and how to speak to the people we met on our journeys. I had to learn these lessons quickly and thoroughly. There was no room for mistakes; they could be fatal. I still did not understand what she meant, but she was my mother and I believed every word she said to me.

We did not see the old woman often. She was just a shadow to us, going in and out of the apartment. I don't know if she wondered about us, who we were and why we happened to be in Nice. In retrospect I think a lot of people knew and just tried to help without saying anything. Whenever we went out in the street to buy mother, my mother held my hand in a tight grip close to her and with the other hand she held the silver package. I do not recall being very anxious, but I often asked myself why we were always running and why my mother kept telling me to be so careful.

I had seen the men take away my father; I had seen my brother walk away and not return. Why did they all disappear with the rest of the family? I didn't know. And I could not ask my mother because she always said, "I am here, do not worry. We will survive." What did "survive" mean? Another word I did not understand. I had no one to ask, so I kept silent.

We were in a strange city, alone in a crowd of people. We could not ask anyone for advice and we could not talk to anyone. I felt like a shadow. It was difficult for me to understand why people did not see me. Sometimes someone spoke to me or gave me sweets.

I was sometimes afraid of her somber moods. She would not speak to me for hours. She would break her silence only when we ventured out into the street. We hoped to blend into the tapestry of people in motion and disappear into the crowds.

We walked in the evening. After being cooped up in our room the entire day, it felt good to be out in the open. We tried to merge with the mass of people in the street, coming from work or shopping. We looked at the happy faces, those who were sitting leisurely at cafes, drinking and eating sandwiches, laughing with friends. We did not dare go into any of those places. My mother was afraid of being too conspicuous and drawing attention to us. She thought she looked

different from everyone else, that she stuck out with her foreignness. We stopped at a bakery and bought a sandwich and bottled water. Then we would go and sit in Massena Square. We never stayed long in one place; we kept moving. When we ate, my mother kept looking around cautiously, one hand on my arm, the silver firmly held between her knees.

The evenings were sweet, the sky getting darker and beginning to shine with all the stars and a bright moon. The city was not dark; there were lights in the streets and around the square. The streets were busy with people; there were very few cars. Only the sidewalk cafes were noisy. The Italian soldiers were unobtrusive, calm and casual, watching the crowds. They did not bother anyone; they even smiled at me. They looked to us as if they were just emerging from an operetta, with their colorful uniforms and especially their plumed hats. I loved to look at them. They seemed so carefree, standing in groups and talking and laughing. The Italians really protected the Jews placed under their watch. My mother, who always wanted me to ignore soldiers in general, had told me that the Italians were not hounding the Jews and I could smile at them.

Then we walked back to our room on the Boulevard Massena. My mother would never leave me alone by myself. I often wanted to wander around on my own. As usual, when I asked my mother why, she did not answer but told me to be quiet. After the war, when we reunited, I asked her about this and she told me that during the war years, there was a rumor that the Germans kidnapped little blonde girls with blue eyes who looked like them. They were drawn to me. Even though there were no Germans parading yet in the streets of Nice, she was cautious. It was only then, many years later, that I would come to understand a lot of things about my mother's behavior during that time.

We spent the rest of that first week resting. My mother was exhausted. I was a child and after a day or two of inactivity, I was restless and wanted to play or get out of our small room. It was tiny but had a window overlooking the backyard. In the morning the birds sang. There were flowers and trees. Sunlight lit the room and lifted our spirits; we felt a little hopeful.

There was just one small cot for both of us and it was a little tight. There was a washbasin and a chamber pot under the bed. We had a small toilet in a closet outside our room, but the chamber pot was used during the night. There was a tiny table in the room with two metal chairs. We always carried them around when we wanted to sit somewhere else in the little room so we would not make noise. We hung up out few pieces of clothing on a wooden armoire—the clothes we had managed to smuggle out of our apartment in Paris when we had to run away: one extra shirt and a scarf for me and a jacket and a few undergarments for my mother. I think she had one extra dress, a light coat, and perhaps socks for both of us. I remember her washing the clothes at night and letting them dry so we could wear them. My mother let me carry the bundle of clothes but not the silverware.

My mother would not let allow me to leave the room at night. During the day it was easier. She could stand at the door and wait for me. She was afraid of meeting someone who was curious about us and who might ask questions. I actually do not remember encountering anyone except an occasional elderly woman, perhaps the landlord.

We usually went shopping for food, which was plentiful in Nice, early in the morning. My mother never told me how she paid for our food. She probably had exchanged one of the spoons for cash. We purchased ready-made food; we had an electric plate. We made tea and we would reheat some of the food we bought. Then we stayed in the room, quiet as mice.

We ate, rested and I read aloud the *Nice Matin*, the newspaper my mother had bought earlier. She wanted to know what was happening in the world. I had learned to read at La Maternelle-- the kindergarten in France. My parents had a passionate belief in the value of education, so I went to kindergarten at the age of 4, and then on to regular school when I turned 6. I did not understand the significance of what I was reading, but I had to read the paper from front to back for her. First I read the headlines and she would explain the meaning of some of them to me. This was our entertainment every day. It was the only way to find out what was happening. We did not have a radio. My mother also liked to hear about the movies. She always had a soft spot for the actors and actresses of the cinema.

I still did not understand who we were running away from, or why our existence had been shredded to pieces. I was puzzled and sad. On some level I must have understood that this was not a game we were playing.

Whenever my mother had to make a decision, she did so without hesitation. I had to go along with the decision even when I did not understand it, even if it was painful. In Nice, she made a decision that impacted my life irrevocably.

One day while reading the front page of the newspaper, I came across a headline that I read to my mother: The Italians were leaving and the Nazis were on their way. They would occupy the south. The collapse of Mussolini meant that the Italian Zone would be evacuated and it would give the Germans the opportunity to round up the Jews. I understood that we were running away from the Germans.

My mother asked me to repeat the headline and to read the details of the article. She suddenly became very agitated. She grabbed her bag, and searched feverishly through it, tossing

the contents on the table. She found a small piece of paper which she held in her hand. She told me to get dressed quickly, and without waiting for me to finish putting on my sweater, she almost dragged me outside with her. She was like a woman possessed. Her face had turned ashen, her mouth was tightly pinched. She muttered in Yiddish behind clenched teeth. I wanted to ask her where we were going so hastily, but I knew better. I kept quiet and held her hand.

She held the silver package in her hand. She put the little piece of paper in her pocket. As soon as we hit the street, she held me close to her side. The streets were busy. People were talking, talking, sitting leisurely in the cafes. Her impulse was to run, but she slowed down, realizing that the sight of a woman dragging a young child behind her while the streets were filled with strolling people might attract attention. She gave me the piece of paper and told me she did not know how to find the address that was written on it. She told me to ask for directions. A friendly passer-by explained to me how to reach our destination.

We kept on walking, and then I saw the street we were looking for and the right address. We had arrived, but why were we here? I kept quiet as usual. My mother stopped in front of the building and looked around to see if someone was watching. The street was quiet. There were no passing cars or strolling people. She pushed me in front of her against the door as if to hide me. She rang the bell. We waited. The door opened a crack and a voice asked us what we wanted. My mother said in her Yiddish accent and in a low voice: "We are here to talk to the people in the OSE." The door opened a little more and a young woman appeared. She peered at us. My mother whipped out her identity card with the word "Jew" inscribed on her picture. The young woman quickly pulled us inside.

We found ourselves in a dark room. The windows were shut and covered with heavy drapes. A lamp cast a deep shadow on the furniture, which was covered with white sheets. The room looked as if it was haunted by ghosts. I felt cold and afraid. I stood close to my mother. The young woman disappeared behind a closed door and we were left alone. We could not hear anything. We did not move. My mother was silent. Her body had stiffened. She held the package of silver with one hand and with the other she held me by the shoulder. I felt a cold vibration coming from her, and I became more and more frightened.

The door reopened and the woman returned. She spoke to my mother in Yiddish. They spoke softly. I could not catch one word, but at some point my mother lifted her hand from my shoulder to dab at her eyes. Why was she crying? The young woman gazed at me and smiled. She left the room again. While we were alone, my mother took my hand in hers and explained.

“The OSE,” [Oeuvre de Secours aux Enfants] she said, “is a child welfare organization. They rescue Jewish children and find homes for them with French families or convents.” I was totally confused and frightened. “They will help us.” Then she said, “We are going to see a priest. Remember: do not talk unless asked a question. And be careful how you answer. It would be better for you not to talk at all. We are in grave danger and the priest is going to help us.”

“Why do we need help?” I asked her. She did not answer. There was no time to explain. Everything unfolded rapidly. The woman came back and spoke to my mother. Then she turned to me and said, “You and your mother are going to see a priest on the other side of this building. I will take you there now. Please listen carefully to what he is going to say. Your lives depend on it. Good luck.”

What was a priest? What was happening? I could not understand a word of what the young woman said. I heard words but they meant nothing. I gazed up at my mother. She took my hand and squeezed it. "I will explain later," she said. "We have to hurry now." We left the room and found ourselves on the street again. The young woman came with us and pointed at another door. She gently touched my mother, and we started to walk.

My mother knocked at the door and while we waited, she said, "Greta, we have to separate. You will go into hiding with a French family or in a convent. I don't have time to explain what a convent is, but in either place you will be safe. The German are coming and they will round up all the Jews. This way you will be safe, and I will also go somewhere and hide and I will also be safe. This will not be for long. When the war is over I will come and take you with me, and we will be together again and happy, and we will forget all this. But for now this is the best thing for you."

I was stunned. I must have done something terrible. Was I such a bad girl that she wanted to get rid of me? I was choking on my silent tears. I looked up at my mother but she avoided looking at me. There was just her hand on my hand, almost twisting my fingers. She did not speak to me again.

The door opened, and we were pulled inside. The windows of the room were covered with scarlet drapes. As I cried I saw a man in a long gray robe with a hood on his head and naked feet. He told us to wait for the Monsignor, who would see us shortly. We stood in the dark room, the silence enveloping us. We waited.

Someone who seemed like a shadow glided into the room. A person in a red robe, a red cap and a long crimson vestment, a large cross hanging from his neck, sat down behind a desk

and started to shuffle papers. An enormous ring on one of his fingers mesmerized me; I could not take my eyes away from its glimmer. Without looking directly at us, he spoke in a very low voice. My mother listened. I was awed by the figure behind the desk shrouded in a long dress. I gazed around the room. Hanging on the wall behind the desk was a figure of an almost naked man on a cross. What was this place? I was terrified.

The man in the red robe kept talking and I caught some words here and there, but they meant nothing to me. I only comprehended that something momentous was happening when I looked at her mother. Her face was white. Her eyes seemed bathed in water on each side of her cheeks. Small rivers were coursing down her face. Her mouth was a line because she was biting the inside of her lips. Her hands were knotted together on her knees and her whole body was rigid.

I was about to ask her what was the matter when the priest told my mother to go, to leave me there, that he would handle it from that point on. My mother bent down to kiss me on both cheeks. She told me to be a good girl, to never cry, never talk, and only answer questions with a yes or no. At the same time, she told me never to forget who I was, and to keep everything well-hidden inside me. I listened but could not understand that she was going to leave me there in the strange red room with the man in a long robe. I was going to ask her, but she stood up and walked out of the room, walked out of my life, leaving me stranded in a room with the stranger in the red robe.

The door closed.

The priest looked at me and spoke in a muffled voice. "You are now Ginette Henry," he said. "You were born in Orange and your parents are dead. You are going to stay in a convent

until we locate your godparents. Then you will go to live with them as soon as possible. Do you understand? You cannot tell your real name to anyone. You cannot tell where you were born and you cannot talk about your parents. Now repeat your new name and your birthplace to me.”

I was speechless. “Talk to me,” the priest said. “You must repeat what I just told you. I have to be sure that you understand the gravity of the situation. Repeat, please.” Finally, with a trembling voice, I said the unthinkable: “My name is Ginette Henry. I was born in Orange and my parents are dead. I am going to stay with my Godparents.” What was a Godparent? I was afraid to ask.

The priest told me to sit down. Someone was coming to take me to a convent. What was a convent?

I was nine years old, and I was an orphan.

Chapter Ten: Grasse

The priest stood up and walked away, closing the door. I waited silently, without crying. My arms were tightly wrapped around my knees, and I was hunched forward, almost ready to run away.

The door opened silently and a young woman came in. She stood in front of me, explaining that she was going to take me to a safe place. I wondered what “a safe place” meant. She went on to say, “It will be somewhere in the country where nobody knows you. The convent situation is not an option right now so you will stay in the country until we can send you to a convent.

The people who will take care of you are aware of the situation.” She went over my new name and made me repeat everything the priest had told me earlier. I asked about my mother, and she told me not to worry, that she would be fine.

The young woman took me by the hand and we left the red room. I did not see the priest again. Outside, by the street curb, in the darkening day, a black car was waiting, motor quietly rumbling. A car door opened and she gently pushed me inside. The windows of the car had small curtains shutting out the street scene. The driver, a young man, did not look back at me. He waited for us to sit down in the back seat and then drove off.

I could glimpse a sliver of sky turning purple through a crack in the curtains. The car moved like a black cat, silently, through streets I did not recognize. No one spoke. I closed my eyes but did not fall asleep. All I knew was that my mother had left me with alone with

strangers, in an unknown landscape.

The car stopped. It was very quiet. We waited in the silent night. Then my companion opened the car door, cautiously stepped out, peering around. She helped me out of the car. I could not see much in the dark, but I could smell flowers. The sky was filled with myriads of stars. My eyes grew accustomed to the dark and I could see fields covered with flowers.

“This is a flower farm,” my guide said in a low voice. “The owners are waiting for you inside the house. I will take you to the front door, knock, and then I will leave and you will go inside. Remember, little girl, speak as little as possible. Do not give any information about yourself to anyone, adults or children.” She gazed into my eyes and said solemnly, “If you do this, as Ginette you might survive.”

She patted me on the head, knocked at the door, and left me standing there while the door slowly and noiselessly opened. I turned around quickly to catch a last look at the young woman. She was the last link to my mother, and she was leaving too. She ran to the silent car, and it took off in the night while I was still standing in front of an open door.

A hand pulled me into the house and the door closed behind me. I was in a dark room, with only the moonlight shining in. I saw a man, a farmer, and a woman in front of me. They asked me if I was hungry. I shook my head; I was too upset. They told me to sit down at a large wooden table with benches on each side. The woman went to the back and brought back a bowl of hot soup and a chunk of bread. I smelled the soup and discovered that I was famished. I had not eaten during this long day.

I ate silently, not raising my eyes. The man and woman stood shoulder to shoulder looking down at me. What did they want from me? I just wanted my mother. The last morsel of

bread stuck in my throat and I started to cough. I was terrified of making too much noise and my eyes filled with tears.

I swallowed hard when the man asked me for my name—only my first name. I blurted out my real name and suddenly heard my mother's voice and the priest's voice speaking in my head: “Wrong, wrong! Your name is Ginette.” I froze on the bench; I was petrified not knowing how to correct myself. Then I heard the woman's voice saying to the man, “It's alright; it's a German-sounding name. She can keep it.”

The woman looked me over suspiciously and said, “She is not strong; she will not last long in the fields. Someone is bound to ask questions. Then what?” The man answered, “We can only try; she is such a small child to be in this situation. She will blend in with the other children at work.” I listened without understanding: what was the situation I was in and what was the work I was going to be doing? I had never worked before; my father and mother worked and I went to school.

The woman pointed to a corner of the room and said to me, “This is where you are going to sleep. The toilet is outside.” She went to the door and pointed. “Go now; we will wait for you.”

I was afraid to go outside alone. I ran to the outhouse under a moonlit sky and returned to the house where it was warm. They left to go to their own rooms and said good night: “We will speak tomorrow.”

I slid under the meager cover on a very small cot. I was uneasy about going to sleep in a place I did not know with people I did not know. I was alone with the shadows in the room created by the moonlight slipping in through the cracks in the covered windows. I did not even

know where I was. I did not undress; I needed to be surrounded by something familiar. I cried. Afraid to make too much noise, I covered my face with the coverlet.

I fell asleep from exhaustion.

I woke up to loud noises, kitchen utensils being knocked around, and the smell of coffee and bread, reminding me that I was hungry. The farmer told me that it was 5 a.m. and to get up, wash my face and my hands after I went to the toilet. When I came back from the outhouse, I washed in a large basin. It was daylight and I looked around the room, which served as the kitchen. Many children were gathered around the table, pushing each other and looking at me mockingly. I lowered my eyes. I was told to sit at the table and was served a breakfast of soup, cheese and bread.

The adults admonished the children to stop fighting, to eat quickly and get to work. At the end of the meal I was pushed out with the other children.

Someone barked an order and the group of children started to walk. I joined them. The sun was coming up and it was getting warmer. We walked for a while, the kids jostling each other. I had no idea where we were going. The kids were looking at me critically. I did not understand their accents and what they were saying. I learned it was a kind of patois spoken in the south of France. Most of them were sons and daughters of the farm workers. No one went to school during the harvest season.

I looked back to see where I was coming from, and I saw a cluster of small houses scattered in a circle. There was a courtyard in the middle of the circle. I saw stables with horses munching hay, and barns filled with flowers in large containers. A large building with chimneys smoking, the place where I had slept, stood in the middle of the small houses.

We kept walking. On each side of the roads there were fields covered with jasmine flowers with a lovely scent as far as I could see. It was beautiful to watch the different colors of the flowers raising their stalks toward the sun. There were many adults and children in the fields, all engaged in specified activities. The farmer, the only person I knew, came up to me and told me to pick the flowers and place them in a bushel near my area of work.

I bent down and picked flowers until the lunch break. I drank and ate and rested a little, lying on the green side of the grubby earth.

We picked more flowers until 7 p.m. without a break. They told us to stop then and head back to the farm for dinner. I could barely walk; my body would not straighten up. Seated at the table with the other children, I watched the farmer speak words which I learned later were prayers. I was served a steaming bowl of soup with a large chunk of bread. I sat alone; the other children were not there.

In retrospect I realized why I was kept apart from the other children in the evenings. Children tease one another and talk freely. I might have said something that jeopardized the farmer and his entourage. I was told to go to bed after supper. My body still ached. I went to my cot, undressed, slipped on a man's shirt they had given me and fell asleep instantly.

The days went by. The season for harvesting the flowers was short. I was so tired at night that I didn't have the energy to think about my life. I was like an automaton moving in the direction I was told to go.

One day, several weeks later, early in the morning, a neighbor came by to cut the children's hair. She took a good look at me and made some comments about my appearance. I was blue-eyed, fair-skinned and blonde while the other children were mostly dark and swarthy.

The farmer eluded most of her questions. But she was suspicious. I did not look like anyone else, and I was too shy and too quiet, unlike the other noisy children.

When she left, the farmer and his wife looked at each other and at me. I felt the usual spasm of fear going through my body. The farmer's wife said in a strained voice to her husband, "I told you: this is too dangerous. She will have to go."

They told me to rejoin the group and work. The day passed. I worked, kept quiet, and did not mix with the other children. At the end of the day, we went back to the farm. I had my usual supper with the farmer and his wife. They did not speak but exchanged furtive glances. I could feel the tension in the air. I felt a ray of hope: perhaps they would let me go back to my mother. I went to sleep dreaming that I might be reunited with her.

In the middle of the night, the farmer's wife shook me awake and told me in a low voice to get dressed. I obeyed, mute with fear. I dressed quickly. Silently the woman pointed to the door. The farmer appeared and told me that everything would be all right. I was going with the people who had brought me to them to a different place where I would be safer. I opened the door and outside in the dark night a black elongated car crouched low on the ground, its engines in low gear. Someone came out of the car, walked over to me, took my arm and led me inside the car. The car started to move. I never said goodbye to the farmer or his wife.

I looked beside me. A young woman smiled at me and put her fingers on my mouth. "Be quiet," she said, "I will explain later. The driver, a young man, turned around to look at me and said, "Do not be afraid. You are safe with us." I hoped against hope that my mother would be waiting at the end of the trip.

We arrived in front of a building that looked vaguely familiar. It was dark and I was not allowed to ask questions. The car stopped. The young woman took me by the hand and we got out of the car. The driver blew me a kiss. The car door stayed open while the young woman stood at a barely visible door and rang a muted bell. The heavy door opened. Someone in a long black robe stood in the shadows. The young woman said something in a low voice and the black robe moved towards me, a hand appeared, took mine and we started to walk. I turned around and saw the heavy door closed behind me. My tiny hope that my mother was waiting somewhere was fading.

Where was I? I looked up at the person in the black robe and could not tell if it was a man or a woman. The building seemed familiar; I felt I had been there before. I was ushered into a room with red drapes and a large desk. Behind the desk, a cross with a man on it was hanging on the wall. And then I remembered that it was in this room that my mother had left me, closing the door behind her and disappearing. Why was I there again? Was my mother coming to get me?

Later that day I was sent to another place called a “convent.”

I never saw the farmer and his wife again. I did not even learn their names. I did not know where the farm was located in that little town of Grasse. Later I realized that these people risked their lives and the lives of everyone around them to help Jewish children. And so did the guides who transported Jewish children to different hiding places. The one thing these guides had in common was their youth. They were all around 18 years of age—so young and so dedicated to their work, saving Jewish children.

I salute you all, young and old, Jews and non-Jews, who helped during that terrible war on innocent children.

Chapter Eleven: The Convent

There was a black iron gate that opened, leading to a front door. I was pushed through the door—a parcel that someone wanted to get rid of. The driver, who had dropped me off in front of the gate, ran back to his car and drove off.

It was dark, not quite night, and the stars were slowly starting to shine in the sky. It was very quiet. I stood there, eyes looking downward. I felt a presence. Someone was coming toward me. I lifted my eyes and saw a very young woman dressed in a floor-length black robe, a white collar framing her face, brown piercing eyes, a pink complexion, and a generous mouth. Her hands were folded over a cross hanging from her neck. She smiled a radiant smile that illuminated her face, her white teeth gleaming. Her long fingers left the cross to stroke my face and brush the hair away from my forehead. She came closer and hugged me.

I had not been touched by a kind person for so long that I had forgotten how it felt. I felt swept up in a maelstrom of emotions. I did not know who she was, this woman dressed in black with sandals, enfolding me in a warm embrace.

I wondered if I could tell her my real name. She lifted a finger to her lips indicating that I should not speak. My eyes filled with tears. Was I safe?

“Do you want some food?” she whispered. “Let’s go to the kitchen.” She took a handkerchief from her pocket and gently dried my tears.

Food had been scarce on my journey. I nodded my head and my mouth started to salivate. She took me by the hand and we walked through a door in the next building. She closed the door and we were alone. She told me to sit down on a hard wooden bench at a large table in the kitchen. She brought me a bowl of soup and a big chunk of bread. I was so

famished that I almost choked on the bread.

While I ate, she sat across from me, her arms and hands hidden in her black sleeves, and looked at me with soft eyes. After I had finished eating, we walked outside. We were like two shadows gliding in the night, a tall shadow pulling a small shadow. She stopped in front of a small house, climbed a few steps and opened a door. Then she opened a second door, and pulled me inside. She did not open any lights.

“This is your room; you will sleep here,” she said. “In the morning I will take you to eat and to meet the family.” I sat down on the cot. She kissed me, made a sign over my head, and left. I was alone in a small room with only the cot I was sitting on, white-washed walls, and a tiny window. The cot had one threadbare blanket. There was a tiny table on the side of the room with a small lamp that would provide the only light in the room, a wash basin, pitcher of water and a sliver of brown soap. I washed my face. I remember the harshness of the towel on my skin. The chamber pot was under the bed.

I lay down in my clothes. I pulled my sweater tightly around me and crossed my arms over my body trying to retain some warmth. I thought of how my mother had lovingly dressed me before we went to see the priest.

I fell asleep. I woke up during the night. A moon ray was shining through the window. Above my head I saw a cross with a man nailed to it hanging over my bed. I sat up petrified. I closed my eyes. I did not want to look at it. Then I remembered that the young woman who embraced me was also wearing a cross on her chest. What was the meaning of it? Why was it hanging on the wall? Who was this man on the cross? I was afraid to go back to sleep. I slipped back beneath the cover, covering my face, closed my eyes and finally drifted into a dreamless

sleep.

The warm touch of the morning sun woke me up. When I opened my eyes I did not know where I was. The bed felt hard under me. The cross was still there on the wall. The door opened. The same young woman entered. “Bonjour. Wash your face and your hands. We will have some food; then we will do our chores after the prayers, and you will meet the family.” I looked at her smiling face and in a timid voice I asked, “Prayers? What are prayers?” She squeezed my hand and said, “I will explain later. Now, come with me, listen and do what I tell you. My name is Sister Andrea and I am a nun. You have to do exactly as I tell you; do you understand?” “Yes,” I replied, and wondered about the prayers, the man on the cross and another new word I had just heard: “nun.”

We walked out in the emerald sunshine. The morning was luminous. The sun was high in the sky, the blue mountain towering over the convent, which was nestled at its feet. The sides of the mountain were covered with pine trees and bright yellow mimosas, flowers from the South.

Sister Andrea guided me towards an archway circling the inside walls of a large building with a red and yellow brick roof. A few steps lead to the front door, its facade flanked by windows on both sides and a tall palm tree with its feathered leaves shading the brick roof like a sentinel keeping guard.

I followed her inside a spacious room with a massive wooden table flanked by two long benches on each side. It was the sisters' dining room. A group of women, dressed like Sister Andrea, noisily bustled about, all waiting to be seated. A few of them came over to gaze at me, tittering among themselves. One of the sisters came closer and patted me on the head. Then she

looked more closely at my long matted hair, lifted one of my braids and said, “Cut the hair; she has lice.”

“No, please,” I said, “not my hair.” My hair was the only thing that still belonged to me. It reminded me of how my mother would wash and plait it into braids all around my head like a crown, as if I was a princess.

“We must cut it,” said Sister Andrea. “I promise you it will grow back.”

That morning I lost another facet of who I was. I became a stranger to my own eyes. I always had had long blonde hair. I was the only blonde in my family. I looked in the window pane and saw a different little girl. I saw another face, lost and forlorn, staring at me.

The bowl of milk and piece of bread comforted me. I realized that I was hungry. I wolfed the bread down in almost one gulp, choking on it and making the nuns laugh.

They told me that I looked very cute with my short hair. After breakfast Sister Andrea took me by the hand and said, “So now that you've met the family, we will go to the chapel for our morning prayers.” Perhaps I would learn now what prayers were, and who all these women were in their long black robes and hats. Later on I was told that the hats were called wimples.

We walked out into the morning sunshine. We approached a small house adjacent to the cloister with a white wall and a red brook roof. The house had a bright red door surrounded by sculpted columns, each with a stone sculpture of a face. “Saints,” said Sister Andrea, pointing. Yet another word I did not know. I would have to remember all these new words and ask Sister Andrea what they meant. She opened the door. “This is our chapel, and this is where we pray. You must be very quiet.”

I followed her inside. I was spellbound by the white interior and overwhelmed by the silence. There were white stone walls, black benches, an altar with a gigantic cross hanging on the back wall between stained glass windows. Mediterranean light streamed through them. I could see images in those colored panes of glass. Flowers and plants were placed all around the chapel.

The heavy door closed behind me. I was suddenly convulsed by uncontrollable shaking. I could not move, engulfed by so many whirling feelings, the strangeness of it. The cross, the man nailed to it, the chapel, all these women—nuns they called themselves. Where was I? Who were these women wearing long dresses? What would happen to me now? Would I never see my family again? I cried.

Sister Andrea understood; she saw my anguish. She whispered, “Don't worry; I will explain everything to you after prayers. Meanwhile, sit on that bench near the door and be silent.” She walked to the altar, knelt down on the stone floor, head bent and hands crossed in front of her.

My eyes wandered aimlessly, trying to understand what I was looking at. I had stopped shaking, but I was still anxious. I folded my arms tightly around my body for comfort. Further down the wall, I discovered a closed black iron grille. Craning my neck to look through it, I saw other nuns behind the gate. Later I learned they were cloistered: they never left the convent, and no one could approach them or talk to them. I sat still, waiting for Sister Andrea to come back and explain.

Suddenly I heard singing. It came from the nuns behind the grille, their heads lifted towards the cross on the wall, hands clasped across their chests, eyes closed in sheer ecstasy.

The beautiful sounds, unlike anything I had ever heard before, were profoundly moving.

Sister Andrea came silently back and sat down near me, her hand on my shoulder, while the music and the magical voices continued. I sat in a trance listening to the harmonious sounds. My mood lifted and I thought I might be safe there for a while until I found my parents again.

After the music stopped, I began to ask many questions of Sister Andrea. In a very low voice I said, “Who is the man on the cross? Why are the nuns behind the grille? Why are you all wearing long dresses and sandals and naked feet? What are prayers?” She shushed me and said that all my questions would be answered later. I had to be quiet now, as a mass—another word I did not understand—was in progress.

A man walked down the aisle, dressed in a brown cloud of a robe that was belted with a rope, his naked feet in sandals. He stopped in front of the altar and knelt. He spoke in a language I did not understand, and the nuns responded in singsong fashion. I watched and listened. When it was over, I left with Sister Andrea and we went for a stroll under the covered archway. She took out a necklace from a pocket inside her robe. She rolled it around her arm and, while twirling the white beads (I later learned it was a rosary), a succession of pearl beads with a small cross at one end, she told me about the man on the cross, the meaning of it and the nature of the prayers. She spoke to me about the brown-robed monk who had conducted the mass for the sisters. He came from the Order of the Franciscan Friars, a monastery near by. He visited every week and on special occasions as well.

She explained that all the sisters in the cloister were part of the order of the contemplative order called “the Clarisses.” The sisters followed the example of Saint Francis of Assisi and Saint Claire. They never left the convent or spoke to anyone. They prayed, and only

contemplated heaven. She explained that the cloistered sisters took vows to devote their entire lives to God—to live in poverty, never speak, and never have any contact with the outside world.

Sister Andrea and a handful of sisters performed all the chores. They were not the cloistered nuns; they had taken different vows when they came to the convent. They were allowed outside and they could converse with anyone. They were allowed to leave the premises to do errands for the convent. They had different chores; some of them cooked for the entire convent. They brought food to the 40 cloistered nuns and left it on their doorstep, and they also cooked for 10 others as well as the children in hiding. They also did all the cleaning. Some performed errands or worked in the garden, others cleaned. Days were spent working; any spare time was reserved for prayers. Since they were not cloistered, they were called the “externs.”

They abided by a strict code of laws. They could only stay outside the convent long enough to do their errands. They were not allowed to discuss their monastic life with anyone on the outside. They were not permitted to bring any news or gossip into the convent. No one was allowed to enter the convent before sunrise or remain after sunset.

There were only three or four hidden children at the convent. The others were orphans from the region. The hidden children mixed in nicely with the rest of the children. It would have been both difficult and dangerous to keep them separated; this way they were part of a homogenized group.

What helped in my case was my Aryan appearance, and of course I was very obedient, ready to follow all the rules without saying a word. Sister Andrea had a little sister whom she loved very much. She described her as being a tiny girl with blond hair and a sunny disposition. She missed her a lot and had not seen her since she had entered the convent. I think this was one

strong reason that she became so attached to me. She had told me I could stay by her side all the time. I felt as if I was part of a small family and I loved the attention and affection. The other sisters were relieved to have Sister Andrea taken complete charge of one of the hidden children. They were all aware of the dangers inherent in hiding Jewish children, yet they all participated wholeheartedly.

I was overcome and fascinated by the novelty of the convent. I asked Sister Andrea if she would explain more about it to me. She smiled and said, "I will teach you enough so that you will understand the ways of the convent. It's very important for you to blend in. We don't want to arouse anyone's suspicions about your presence here."

I loved the grounds inside the walls of the convent: the pretty flowers, the trees, and especially a palm tree which became my friend. One of my best moments was when I sat at its feet, my back against its rugged skin. I used to talk to that palm tree. Of course it did not answer, but I was happy that I could talk to it and it would listen. I would tell it stories about the family I once had. I would whisper secretly my real name, my brother's and my parents' names. I would make it swear that it would not reveal my hidden life. The sisters passing by would smile at me. I talked to the tree in my head; my lips did not move. I felt better after our one-sided conversations. Even on a rainy day, I would sit under the palm tree, misted by the raindrops hanging from the branches. Looking up at the canopy above my head, the raindrops resembled tears on eyelashes. I would sit there until one of the sisters would approach me and scold me gently for getting wet.

When I remember the convent now, I always see myself alone with Sister Andrea or trailing after her. I became very attached to her; she seemed to adopt me. I was her little

shadow. I was not friendly with the other children. I was afraid someone would start talking about their families, and that I was not allowed to reveal anything about my history. That kind of conversation was forbidden for me. There were other children who were hidden like me; others were orphans. My favorite time was going with Sister Andrea to pick flowers everyday for, as she explained, the glory of God. We placed the flowers inside the chapel. They smelled so nice and were so pretty to look at. I could have stayed inside the whole day enjoying them.

Another priest, tall and blond, taught us grammar and arithmetic in a makeshift classroom. He spoke to us in French. He always pinched my cheeks gently. I learned my catechism from a handbook that taught the precepts of religion. We were taught that Jesus Christ was the son of God and that he had died on the cross. All sinners were redeemed by His sacrifice. I did not understand any of it, but I learned the prayers by rote.

I was always hungry. We ate dry bread and a bowl of a watered-down coffee mixed with milk. I ate the bread slowly to make it last. I usually ate with Sister Andrea who would give me another piece of bread. We ate lunch in a large dining room with a big wooden table in the center and long benches. There was only one chair at the shorter side of the table. The room was vast, with a high ceiling and large windows through which the sun streamed. On the wall was that man hanging on the cross.

I would enter with Sister Andrea and sit down on one of the benches. She walked away to stand behind the chair. Other children came in slowly and quietly, shuffling like old people, darting furtive looks around them. I was also very quiet and stared into space. We were all waiting for the food to arrive. Our stomachs growled. I remember trying to squeeze my stomach with both hands to quiet it down. I feared any noise would make me conspicuous.

Another sister came in and stood in front of the chair. She told us to stand up, and she said a prayer in Latin. I had no idea what she was saying. I waited, along with the other kids, for the prayers to end so we could eat. At the end we all said "Amen." We sat down. There were pitchers of water on the table, and the sisters filled the glasses. Then the food arrived in large containers. The sisters served us large portions. The food was strange to me. One dish looked like a gelatinous mound of green; I could not identify it. I had been a finicky eater at home, but here I had no choice: I had to eat or starve. My hunger was so great that I was able to eat most of it, but I could not stomach the rutabaga. Then we were served fava beans with bread. When the sisters left us alone for a few moments, I threw the rutabaga out the open window. The other kids wolfed down their food.

On the following day we were served the same foods. I realized that if I did not eat, I was doomed. So I swallowed the rutabaga as well as the beans. My stomach was filled, and I was no longer hungry all the time.

The community of sisters was happy to have one of their own, Sister Andrea, take total charge of the children. A special dispensation from the Mother Superior allowed me to follow along with Sister Andrea wherever she worked inside the convent. I did not sleep in the dormitory with the other children. I had a private room near Sister Andrea. I was very aware of my privileged position in the convent and I did not talk to anyone.

I stayed apart from the other children because of my mother's injunction to keep to myself. They were always asking questions, trying to find out who I was and where I came from. We did have classes together and catechism every day, and we ate lunch together. Sometimes we would go for a walk on the back road where there was no traffic. We had

religious education together. None of the children wore the yellow star. In effect we weren't Jews anymore; we were practicing Catholics. We were indoctrinated every day and did our catechism and prayers.

12:15 was the most important time for the hidden children: lunchtime. We seemed to always be hungry. When we walked into the refectory, we had to stand behind the benches aligned along the big table, avert our eyes, and bend our heads in prayer. The sisters would come in one by one, bow toward the cross hanging on the back wall, go to their places and stand until grace had been said. We waited for the "Amen." Then everyone could sit but not talk. We could smile at one another but not laugh out loud. A sister would recite the day's passage from a book of sermons. The food was so strange to us. Sitting around at the table under the watchful eyes of the sisters, we secretly exchanged eye rolls and kicks under the table.

What I recall most are the constant pealing of the bells, calling the sisters to different prayers during the day. There were nine daily prayers from Monday to Friday. There were two extra prayers on Friday. On Thursdays they prayed until midnight. There were eight prayers on Saturday and seven on Sunday, beginning at 6:30 a.m.

It was a strict schedule and provided a sense of peace and serenity. Even as a child I could appreciate the regularity of the days. It was a life of solitude, humility, chastity, obedience, poverty, silence and worship.

Now I remember those days fondly. Sister Andrea was my mother, father and brother. She asked me to pray and listen to her stories about Jesus from the Bible, but she never pressured me. I still have visions of the sisters rustling through the corridors, sailing in their dark robes like boats on the sea. The silence pervading the cloister gave me peace. I loved the

peal of the chapel bells marking the days and nights, and I liked the ritual of the mass. The daily routine was a lifeline after all the running and hiding I had done. I was enthralled with the pageantry and the exotic strangeness of the convent.

Life in the convent would leave an indelible mark on me. The taking of the veil was heart-wrenching. Young women, probably not older than 18, had come to the convent to become nuns. After a time of novitiate lasting three years, they took their vows. Their parents were invited to witness their marriage to God. The chapel was filled with a profusion of white flowers. The altar was so white, it was almost blinding in its brilliance. The applicant walked in with two sisters on a red carpet especially laid out on the floor for the occasion.

The future bride of God wore a long white dress, her head covered in a veil, holding a garland of white flowers. She was surrounded by a sister on each side of her. She hid her face as she stood there, receiving communion. Sometimes there was coercion if she hesitated. Then the veil was taken off and her beautiful hair was cut by a sister and the locks fell on the floor. The white headdress was placed on her head. All we could see from afar was her white face fluttering under the two wings shading her face. After this they lay on the marble floor of the chapel, crucifix fashion: body against the floor, arms spread out. They looked like butterflies on a piece of cardboard, unable to fly away. The cloistered sisters, hidden behind the black iron grill, sang beautiful hymns. The family, sitting on the chapel benches, cried softly. This would be the last time they would see their daughter.

I wanted so badly to be that girl prostrated on the floor, in her virginal white dress, giving my young life away to the man on the cross. My emotions were enflamed. The gold crosses placed all around the chapel, the beauty of the gothic stained glass windows with their etched

figures of saints with the sun blazing through them, the glow of the candles and the mass of flowers made me long to be a part of that community.

The ceremony concluded with the naming of the new sister. They now became anonymous, and accepted all the duties and rules of the convent. They were no longer allowed to be with their families. They renounced all the material things of the world. When they left the chapel, still surrounded by two sisters, they had new identities.

For me seated in the back of the chapel, the ceremony was unforgettable. The symbolism of the bride moved me; I thought that this was what I wanted to be when I grew up. I also wanted that prayer book that was given to the novice, with its a soft leather cover, a red silk string holding the pages and the gleaming gold seal on the three sides of the book.

The days were punctuated by ringing bells calling the sisters to the chapel for prayers. I remember them walking through narrow long hallways, past the heavy doors, the stone statues, little candles burning. It was all new to me. I asked many questions of Sister Andrea. I did not understand some of her answers, but as long as she was by my side, I trusted her implicitly. I particularly loved the chapel with its windows of colored glass, warm sunshine streaming through them. It was open to everyone during the day; only at night did the entrance to the convent close. I was in awe of the life-size statues, the golden objects on the altar, the gleam of velvet and vases filled with flowers.

I followed Sister Andrea when she dipped her fingers into the holy water bowl. She explained the meaning of the holy water later. The concept filled me with wonder. I did not really understand, but anything Sister Andrea said was fine with me. I did not have to understand everything I saw or heard. I knew that the only important thing was for me to listen

and not to talk. I did exactly that.

I loved it when the cloistered sisters kneeling behind the iron black grille started to sing. They had such beautiful voices. Since I never saw them any other time, I would try to catch a glimpse of them while they sang. With their heads and faces hidden under the wimple, their hands folded inside the long sleeves of their habit, I could not really see them. They were like ghosts to me in their long black dresses. They were motionless while kneeling, the shine of the cross glittering in the shadowy light. I was impressed and scared. The sisters looked transfixed. When they finished singing, they filed out in long processions, heads bowed, and returned to the cloister to pray. They never left the cloister, except when they died and were buried in a nearby cemetery. If they became ill, they would try to cure themselves. In a grave situation a doctor was called. But this was rare.

Despite my fear, the music and singing continued to lull me and ease my anxiety. It was a balm to me. The sound of their voices erased visions of men in black uniforms holding guns. I momentarily forgot the reality of my situation, my constant fears about my family's whereabouts. The nuns' voices penetrated deep inside me, like a soft hand caressing me and lifting the heavy veil hanging over me. The chapel was like an oasis, and I wanted to stay there.

The chapel had a quiet simplicity. Wooden benches lined the length of the chapel on each side. Stone pillars soared up toward the ceiling. I could feel the stillness and the beauty of the chapel, and time seemed to stand still, with just the music rippling through the air, engulfing me in a kind of trance. It felt good and safe. Sister Andrea gazed at me with a smile on her lips.

I learned to do the sign of the cross, to first touch my forehead, and then my right and left shoulders. Then I had to say the names of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, and

finished with “Amen,” finally touching my solar plexus. I followed whatever the congregation did sitting, standing or kneeling. I tried to singsong with the townspeople, not knowing the words. They came to the Mass on Sundays. I was the only hidden child who was allowed to be in the chapel; the others were hiding in the dormitory and not allowed to leave the premises. One sister stayed with them. I was not permitted to take communion, so I just sat in the back of the chapel and watched the nuns swallow the white wafer with envy.

On visiting days, families were allowed inside the convent and they would visit with their novice daughters before they took their vows. I had to hide way back in the garden in a little house at the end of the property. Sister Andrea came to bring me food, but for the rest of the time I was alone and hidden until the last visitor left.

Still, I had found an oasis of peace and love. Outside the monastery I heard the Nazis—their boots endlessly stomped the pavement outside the high walls separating the convent from the rest of the city. I remembered the sound of boots stomping up to my apartment in Paris and I was terrified.

I was 10 years old now and very impressionable. Images of the sisters praying were etched indelibly in my mind: Sister Andrea in her habit, kneeling in front of the Monstrance, a gold vessel in the shape of a sunburst in the center of which rested a glass panel, a consecrated host. Her hands were folded perfectly in front her. She had merged with her prayers. She had no self; she was an image of perfect concentration, all spirit. I was entranced.

I know that deep down Sister Andrea hoped that I would become like her. She probably thought that if no one claimed me at the end of the war, I would stay, be baptized, and when I turned 18 I would take my vows and stay in the church. I was conflicted: on the one hand I

wanted to return to my family; on the other I was so loved that I wanted to stay there. No decisions were imminent. I was in the convent and I was happy. The sadness of my previous life was abating. I did not think a lot about it. Once in a while shadows of that life would engulf me. I would try to retrieve some snippets of it but it was fading slowly into a void. Sometimes I would hear the long forgotten voices of my family, but the bells of the chapel would dispel them and I would return to the fold, shaking my head, trying to push away disturbing sounds.

I still ask myself why the nuns saved the Jewish children, risking their lives on a daily basis. Some of them, when they were asked, replied that to save a Jewish child was like saving the child Jesus.

Chapter Twelve: Escape from the Convent

A black car, its lights extinguished, its motor running low, waited in front of the convent. The heavy doors opened. A small child was pushed out from behind the narrow opening. A hooded form stood behind her. It was dark. The moon shone over the convent.

The hooded form took me by the hand and told me in a very low voice not to say a word. I was silent and petrified. Why was I being banished from the convent? What had I done? I was trembling with fear. Where was I going? I held on tightly to the hand of the sister. I did not know who she was. Her face was hidden by the hood covering her head.

Where was Sister Andrea? She always said that she was my friend.

I sat in the back seat of the black car. The driver was behind the wheel and another person was sitting beside him. No one spoke. I moved closer to the car window and looked out. The car doors closed. The car was moving. I took a last look at the wall surrounding the convent. The car moved silently away in the black night under a white moon.

I could not see the driver's face; it was in the shadows. I saw his hands on the wheel. The other person sat hunched, hands folded. I did not know who they were. Where were they taking me? I looked out at the passing trees, black silhouettes in the dark night. I could hear the sound of the sea. We passed through small towns, the streets deserted. It seemed that we were the only people on the road.

A city sign flashed by: Nice. I could hear the waves crashing on the beaches.

A few days earlier, there had been a commotion in the large hall of the convent. I was in the garden collecting flowers for the chapel. I heard car doors opening and closing, and loud

voices. Sister Andrea came running. She grabbed my hand and took me inside the cloister in the small chapel. She told me to keep quiet and left me there. I was alone, holding the flowers in my hand. Squatting on the floor near a wall, I heard noises. Marching boots. I remembered when I heard those boots for the first time. Suddenly I remembered that I had a mother, a father and a brother. I was terrified. Were those men in boots coming to take me like they took my father? I shut my eyes and put my hands over my ears. I left the flowers on the floor. I was so afraid. My stomach hurt. I wanted to stay and hide there.

I removed my hands from my ears; I needed to know what was happening.

There was a large commotion coming from the large halls. Bright lights were flashing around the walls, both inside and outside. It was near dinner time; the sky was getting dark. I heard loud voices and German words. The language was so similar to the Yiddish I'd grown up with; yet it was spoken by men who destroyed my life by taking my father away and forcing my brother to hide. The boots clicking on the stone floors got closer. I got up and ran to the farthest corner of the chapel, trying to blend into the wall.

After what seemed a long time, the tumult subsided. The boots left. I waited for someone to come. Perhaps I was forgotten, alone in the chapel, and no one would ever find me. Perhaps I could disappear inside the wall.

The door opened. Sister Andrea came in. I was pressed against the wall. I did not move, did not look at her. I was sitting on the floor, trembling, and my arms around my knees and my head almost inside my chest.

She sat down near me. She touched me gently on the shoulder. I pulled back. I instinctively knew that my life in the convent was over. I would have to leave again, and face an

unknown destination and strange people. I did not move, did not look at her.

I hoped that if she did not talk and I did not move, things would stay the same. She waited, looking at me. She said in her low voice, "You have to leave. It is too dangerous for you and the sisters. The Germans are curious and tenacious. They will come back and next time they will thoroughly search the convent. Mother Superior has spoken with the people who brought you here. They are coming soon and you will be placed with a family and you will be safe."

Rocking on my feet, still huddled against the wall, I covered my ears. I did not want to hear the dreaded word: leave. I did not want to face the unknown once more. I was only a little girl; I wanted to stay there.

I wanted to forget about the soldiers.

I looked at her. Her face was so sad. Her hands were folded in prayers. "You have no choice," she said. "You must leave quickly. I would have loved to keep you here."

I knew that I had no choice. No one wanted me. I must be a bad girl if no one wanted me around.

Without a word I stood up. I felt tricked again. I thought that my running days were over. Now I was running again.

On my way out I glanced at the flowers. They looked like me: sad, droopy and dried up.

Sister Andrea guided me back to my little room. She prepared my bag. I really had almost nothing but the clothes on my back. The one thing I had become attached to were the white rosary beads with the cross that Sister Andrea had given me when I was arrived in the convent. It was mine and it was easy to conceal. I made sure it was in my bag.

“We have to wait for nightfall,” Sister Andrea said. “Someone will come and take you to another safe place. Remember your new name, where you were born and that your parents are dead. Remember that you are going to live with your Godparents. Tell me again your new name, birthplace and what you know about your parents. You must forget everything and everyone from the time before you came to us.”

I thought of the cautionary words my mother had repeated during our travels.

I had to keep living. I just had to listen to the adults and the voice of my mother, grinding like a mill in my brain.

But I really did not know who I was anymore. I had already forgotten how to speak Yiddish, which I had spoken fluently at home with my parents and family. I had almost forgotten my real name.

Whenever I thought about my mother, I saw her standing near me in the priest's chamber squeezing my shoulder. With one hand she pushed me closer to the priest and with the other she tried to keep me near her. I remembered the moment she had to let me go and I heard the door close. The heavy carpet underfoot obliterated the sound of her footsteps.

I had turned my head, afraid to move. My mother had disappeared. Then the door closed.

I looked at Sister Andrea. She used to be my friend; now she was sending me away. I repeated my lesson for her. I was now Ginette Henry, born in a small city in the South. My parents were dead and I was going to live with my Godparents. What were Godparents? Were my parents really dead? What did it mean? I did not say another word to Sister Andrea. I just looked at her. I wanted to say: why was I being sent away again? I could not understand but I

had learned over the months not to ask questions.

Now that I had to leave again I had strange dreams. I was running after a group of people in the foggy streets of an unknown city, trying to rejoin them. I could never shorten the distance between them and myself, and they slowly vanished into the ashen tint. But before disappearing, they turned around, and I recognized my mother, father and brother. I kept on running and screaming until my screams woke me up. On mornings after these vivid dreams, I prayed. I had learned all the prayers by heart. I sank to my knees and begged God to return my parents to me.

Sister Andrea stayed with me until nightfall. She prayed and I waited. She tried to talk with me but I did not respond. I was angry. I felt betrayed. She had lied to me.

So she prayed. Sometime later Mother Superior came and told me about the family that would take me to live with them. They were two pharmacists, very well known in Antibes, which was several miles away from Nice, where the convent was located. She told me to remember my new identity. My new life would be out in the open and more exposed. She said I was a smart girl and that I should be very cautious when speaking to people. She told me I had to watch every word, every move. I must follow strict rules of conduct not only for my sake but for the safety of all involved: the couple that was taking me, the organization that was helping the Jewish children to hide, the convent and the church.

I'm not at all sure I understand the danger involved for everyone. I was a small girl and I was just trying to survive. I waited for my life to change.

We all waited. The sisters prayed. I had learned one lesson very well: "Listen. Do not speak. Be still and silent."

Then I heard a muffled sound. A car had just stopped in the driveway. Mother Superior made the sign of the cross over my head and Sister Andrea took my hand. We ran out from the chapel towards the gate. Sister Andrea kissed me and blessed me.

The iron doors opened. A hooded figure grabbed me and guided me towards the open door of a black car. I turned my head and looked back. Sister Andrea raised her hand in a parting gesture. Just before entering the car I said softly, "Sister Andrea, I will be back."

The black car sped through the night. No one spoke. A road sign flashed by. It said: "Antibes, 10 kilometers."

Much later, when I revisited the convent, the Mother Superior told me that the priest with a German accent was in fact a German officer, and that he knew about the kids hidden in the convent. He was the one who warned the sister that the Nazis were going to search all of the convents and monasteries in the region, and told them to place the children elsewhere quickly and discreetly. Not all of the children in the convent were Jews; many were Christian orphans. When the Germans invaded, they made no distinctions.

During that visit, one of the sisters recognized my name. She told me that Sister Andrea had died very young. She said that Andrea always talked about me, about how I had shown such interest in convent life. She was sure that one day I would return to fulfill the promise I made as a child to return to the only place I had known some peace and happiness in the midst of a war so violent it was even a war against children.

Chapter Thirteen:: Antibes

We were still following the coastline. The sound of waves crashed below on the beaches, muting the noise of the car. We were travelers steeped in mystery.

The car slowed down and we stopped. I was crunched against the corner near the door. I was petrified. Why were we stopping? What was happening? I felt safe as long as we were driving. It felt like a long drive to nowhere. I hoped the car ride would never end.

No one had spoken a word to me. I could not see the driver and could not tell if it was a man or a woman. Someone was sitting beside the driver, a hooded figure. The figure turned around and the hood came off. A very young woman, almost a girl just a few years older than I, looked at me and smiled. "We're almost there," she said. "In a few minutes you are going to meet the Cadusseau 's, a young people. They own a pharmacy in the center of Antibes. You are going to stay with them. You are their Godchild. "

"Do you remember who you are now?" she continued. "Let's go over it again. Your name is Ginette Henry. You were born in Orange, a small city near Antibes. Your mother died when you were a baby and your father raised you until he became sick and died. Your Godparents are taking you in now to raise you as their own child. No one knows who you really are. Once a month someone from the OSE, will come by, and pick up or deliver mail. If you want to write to your mother, you must do it our way. Your letter cannot disclose anything about yourself or your whereabouts and you cannot sign your real name, but only the name you have now. You can only say that you are fine and that you miss her. I repeat: no real signature, no address. We will try to locate your mother and deliver the letter. There is no guarantee. I have to emphasize that if the letter couriers are arrested, they will be searched and their letters read.

It would be very dangerous for all of us. If there is an address, the Nazis will shoot the courtier and come to the house you are living in and arrest everyone. There would be nothing we could do to save you. Do you understand?"

I was listening carefully; I was no longer a child now. I understood that my life and my fate were in my own hands. I did not cry. I had to be responsible not only for myself, but for all the people involved in my rescue. As she had said earlier, it was a question of life and death. I had no real notion of what death was, but somehow I understood. I would be silent.

The young woman patted my head, opened the car door and looked out. It was pitch black. She got out, as silently as a cat, pulling me behind her. The driver, a young man, now turned his head, winked at me and said "bonne chance."

We stood in a large deserted street. The air was sweet. I could smell flowers and saw tall trees lining the street. We walked a few paces and stopped in front of a low building. A wooden door opened; we were expected. I could only see dark shadows through the black opening. The young woman exchanged a few words quietly with the shadows. She led me forward. I stood there, silent and scared. Who were those shadows awaiting me in the doorway?

I never learned the young woman's name. She patted me on the shoulder and ran back to the car.

Standing there, glued to the pavement, I did not move. One of the people whose faces I could not see took my hand and ushered me inside the house. I did not see the car leave. I just heard the sound of its wheels slowly fading away.

Surrounded by the eerie stillness, no one moved now. We were the only people alive in that strange night. Suddenly a small bundle of fur shot through the legs of the couple standing in

the doorway. It was a small snarling dog, his teeth bared. He stopped at my feet, growling, sniffing my shoes. I almost cried out, but bit my lips to keep quiet. Everyone moved at the same moment: the dog was pulled away by his collar and I was pulled through the door. The door was closed firmly, the key turned and the dog was locked away.

Inside a dark room, we all looked at one another. They introduced themselves. “We are Maurice and Raymonde Cadusseau,” the man said. “You are safe here with us. We will talk in the morning. Are you hungry?” They gave me a towel and guided me to the bathroom. I washed my face and hands.

The man took me into the kitchen. I sat down at a large wooden table and he gave me a bowl of soup and a chunk of bread. I was famished. I could not remember when I had eaten last. I devoured the soup. I felt the weight of their gazes and felt I was being evaluated. I felt dirty and disheveled. I looked back at them, blinking my eyes, trying to keep my tears from mingling with the soup. The hot liquid made me feel better.

Raymonde stood near the stove, frowning. Maurice smiled. He came over to me and patted me on the head. He said, “Don't worry; you will be fine. We will talk after you have a good night's sleep.” After I finished eating, he took my hand and ushered me into a small room just outside the kitchen. It was windowless and had a small bed and a dresser. The wallpaper was pretty and festive.

Raymonde said, “This is your room. Undress. I am going to find something for you to wear. I'll be right back.” Maurice gave me a kiss on the forehead and wished me a good night and left. Raymonde returned with a long nightshirt which I wore to bed. She said good night and closed the door. I undressed, took off my dusty shoes, put on the shirt with its overlong

sleeves, and slid under the covers.

The room was dark. There were no lights anywhere. I heard people talking but could not make out their muffled voices. I pulled the cover over my head, hugging myself to sleep. Was I safe?

The same nagging questions engulfed me: Where was my mother? Why did I have to leave the convent? When would I finally be safe? I got out of bed to retrieve my beads, my pretty white rosary. Holding them tightly in my hands, I fell asleep from sheer exhaustion.

Raymonde came into my room the next morning. I was awake, lying under the covers, wondering where I was. She told me to get up, get dressed, wash up and come into the dining room. When I entered the dining room, Maurice smiled at me and showed me where to sit. Raymonde placed a bowl of warm milk, bread and jam in front of me. I looked around while eating. It was a large room with French windows, open to let the breeze in, fluffing up the gauze curtains. The furniture was dark, with massive chairs around the big table. There was a dresser filled with dishes and glassware and shiny bare wood floors. The dog was barking somewhere.

A few pictures hung on the walls and a grandfather clock stood in one corner. I fell in love with that old clock. I wondered what I was doing there and who were these two people who were looking at me. I felt as if I was on a ghost train and had to get off at different stops. I was pushed here and there and I was always alone, with no one to talk to and no one who knew me.

Maurice explained to me that he and his wife were pharmacists and that they owned the pharmacy on the street. He told me what a pharmacy was. The couple sat down on the other side of the table and gazed at me. Raymonde spoke gently but without any deep sympathy. I felt coldness in her. She said she was doing this because her husband was in the Resistance and the

OSE had asked for volunteers who would hide Jewish children. Maurice was silent. He just kept looking at me with kind eyes. I did not understand all of what they were telling me. What was the Resistance? I thought I would ask him later.

They told me the same things I had been cautioned about over and over: to remain silent above all. I must be careful: the pharmacy was an open place where neighbors and customers came together and talked and might ask questions. Raymonde said that they were putting their lives on the line by hiding a Jewish child. She also said she would inquire about a school for me. She was not sure I could attend. I brightened at the thought: perhaps I could have a friend my own age.

After the convent, where I had been surrounded by good will and love, I was frightened by her strange coldness. I shivered while she spoke. Maurice sat still, smiling. He warmed me. At least, I thought, he seems to like me. I stopped shivering. I had a friend. I was not completely alone. I smiled back at him.

Raymonde stood up and told me she was going to the school to find out if she could enroll me. I went to my room. A gentle tap on the door surprised me. I heard Maurice's voice: "May I come in?" he asked and opened the door. "Do not be afraid," he said gently. "Don't worry about Raymonde, she will do what she has to do, and stand by you. I am here for you and we will protect you." He came over to me and kissed me on the forehead. "Would you like to see the pharmacy? Come with me." He extended his hand. I placed mine in his and we walked through the apartment.

The pharmacy, which was attached to the apartment, was large, bright and shiny. Small cabinets around the room contained all sorts of drugs and jars were filled with pills and

cosmetics. My eyes fell upon a very large jar filled with candies. I blinked my eyes; I could not believe it. I opened them again: the jar was still there, bursting with colors. I moved toward it. I had not seen anything like it since I left Paris. Food had been so scarce and candies were no longer a part of my life.

Maurice was talking to me and he realized I was not listening to his words. He followed my eyes. They were riveted on the jar. I was mesmerized by it. He laughed and said, "Well, well, thanks heavens; you are still a little girl after all! I was worried about you. I thought you didn't know how to be a kid anymore. Come closer; you're too serious. If I let you take whatever you want from the jar, will you smile?" I think I was smiling when I raised my hand to reach the candies. I had to stand on my toes to reach the top of the counter. I stretched and my hand disappeared inside that cornucopia of sweetness. I could not see my fingers anymore.

My hand finally re-emerged holding a hand full of rainbow-colored candies. I do not remember eating them. I just wanted to hold them in my hand. I was afraid someone would take them from me so I hid my hand in my pocket, feeling the candies. I loved Maurice from that moment on.

Raymonde returned. We followed her inside the office, closing the door. She told me that I was to start school the next day. She emphasized that I would have to be on my guard at all times, watch every word, every move. I don't really know if I realized that if I made a wrong move or said a wrong word everyone would be arrested. I was a little girl and I had to be in charge of my own life.

I went back to the apartment. Maurice asked me about my schooling. Although I knew how to read, he was dismayed at my lack of education. I had had perhaps only a full year of

school. Maurice said he would help me at night with my homework.

There was not much to do. I stayed in my little room. There was a small desk, a world globe, some books and maps, and pictures of plants on the wall. A nice, tiny bed, with a fluffy cover the color of dark rose. The only clothes I had taken with me from the convent were the skirt, blouse and coat my mother had dress me in when we left Paris. Raymond told me would go shopping the next day and she would buy me clothes.

I waited in my room. I took out my only possession, the beads, and played with them. I tried to remember the days of my former life, but I only could hear the priest's voice repeating his warnings about my new identity.

Later there was a light knock on the door. Maurice said "I will show you the apartment and where everything is." He extended his hand and I gave him mine. Raymonde was cooking dinner. To my amazement, the toilet, next to the water closet, had a bathtub. The only bath or shower I had ever seen were the public baths my mother and I used to go to in Rue Oberkampf. The men went on one side the women went on the other.

Just opposite the front door was the room I came to love most: Maurice's study. It was filled with books in bookcases, a desk made out of dark shining wood, and a large armchair. In the days to come I would sit with Maurice in that chair looking at the books. At night the desk lamp lend a soft glow to his face. There was a window with a heavy curtain.

I waited for dinner in my room. I sat on my bed, locking my fingers together in a steeple. I looked at the shimmering white beads of the rosary and at the tiny cross with the crucified man. This was my only possession. I had nothing from my previous life, not even my name. Fingering the beads reminded me to say my prayers. I knelt on the carpet, my head pressed

against the bed. I closed my eyes and memories flooded over me of the convent and sister Andrea.

I remembered that just before we said goodbye, she made me promise that I would return to the convent later. And I had promised. Would I ever see her again?

Raymonde called me to the dinner table. I stood up, hiding my beads inside my pocket where I could feel them. When I went to dinner, there was a package on my chair. "Open it," Raymonde said. She had bought me a pleated navy skirt, a white blouse, a gray jacket, underwear, pajamas and a toothbrush and comb. I was speechless. I looked up at her and in a trembling voice I thanked her. Any show of kindness could reduce me to tears. They both smiled. I took the clothes into my room and returned. Near my plate I found a notebook and black and colored pencils for school.

We ate, and after the convent's food, I found everything delicious. Raymonde was a good cook. With very few ingredients she made ordinary food taste good. We ate mostly potatoes and beans. After dinner we went to the study. They gave me a book about animals in a zoo. I saw Maurice pulling out a radio from a drawer in his desk. They listened to someone speaking in a different language. I learned later they were listening to the B.B.C.

When I went to sleep, I did not think about toys to play with, or friends and family, but about protecting myself from danger. Distrust of any stranger was becoming second nature to me. It was a matter of life or death. I thought of men in uniforms holding guns, taking me away to a camp, or about people disappearing, as my father, my mother and my brother had done. I still did not know what a concentration camp was but it frightened me. I could not fall asleep, thinking of what I had gone through. It felt as if I had already lived through decades of

unrelenting terror. I had to be extra good so that the Cadusseaus would keep me with them.

I was afraid of the next day. I thought of school, of the children and the teacher I would have to face. I thought about forgetting that I was Ginette Henry. I lay in my bed, rigid with fear, until sleep came at last.

The next morning I arose, washed and dressed in my new clothes. I was quiet as a mouse and was sitting at the dining room table when they came in. They looked at me. "Why are you so pale with dark shadows under your eyes?" Raymonde said. "What happened? Didn't you sleep well?" I shook my head and said in a strangled voice, "I'm afraid to go to school. I'm afraid some men in uniform will come and take me away to a camp."

The doorbell rang. Raymonde ran to the door, closing the dining room door behind her. Maurice sat closer to me and told me not to be afraid of going to school. If they thought it was dangerous, they would not send me. It was as dangerous for them as if it was for me: they could also be arrested.

Raymonde called Maurice to come outside. I sat in my chair hoping that I would not have to go to school. I had not touched my breakfast. They returned. "Something has happened," Raymonde said. "The police were at the school yesterday and asked many questions. They visited all the classrooms and talked with the children. They are coming back. You are not going to school."

I was terrified, sinking slowly down on my chair. Maurice put his hand on my head. "Don't worry. You are not going to school today. We'll wait and see how the situation will evolve." I was to stay indoors. He would teach me geography, arithmetic and history at night.

Raymonde told Maurice to talk to me about an escape route. Maurice sat down next to me and said, "We must devise some sort of an escape route for you if by any bad luck, the police come around and ask questions or just want to look inside the apartment. You must be able to leave and go to a designated friend and wait for one of us to come and get you."

He told me that I must follow the exact rules about escape without asking any questions. I was to run to the study room, open the French window, climb on top of a small bench that was placed under the window, and jump out. The apartment was at street level. After that I would be on my own. They told me to walk normally on the side streets to the home of their friends. We would meet these people the following night.

I was told to escape, but from what, whom and why? This was not a game of hide and seeks. This was necessity; this was war. I must do this in order to survive.

The next nightfall we prepared to leave the apartment. Maurice told me to rehearse my escape route. I went to the study while they left by the front door. I opened the window, quietly climbed on the small bench and jumped out into the street. I was small and did not need much space to maneuver. I walked around the corner and they were both waiting for me. Maurice took me by the hand and showed me the streets I should follow in order to get to their friends' house. He continued talking in a low voice as we walked through dark and deserted streets.

We arrived in front of a house. There were no lights, only the moon overhead. Maurice stopped in front of a wooden door in a wall. I could not hear a sound. Holding my hand tightly, he opened the door and we went in. Raymonde closed the latch.

We were in a small area planted with flowers and small trees. It was a gravel alley, winding its way toward a verandah. I heard the sound of the sea. We tread softly, not wanting to

be heard, and climbed up a few steps. Maurice knocked lightly at the glass door. Someone peered out from behind the curtains. The glass door opened and we stepped in.

We were inside a large room. There was a woman, a man and a young boy. I have in mind a picture of the boy with big, frightened eyes and a very white, pale face. He and I were told to play on the verandah but to be quiet. The adults remained inside. I could hear their low voices but did not understand what they were saying. The boy and I sat side by side on a bench. He never looked at me and we did not talk. We did not play either. We swung our legs, listening to the sound of the sea crashing on the beach. Then the adults called us in for a snack, and I was introduced to the couple. I do not remember their names.

Maurice told them I knew the route of escape and how to reach their house. They told me that if necessary, this house was my escape and hiding place. I was to go there and wait for Maurice or Raymonde to come and get me. I wanted to know who the boy was, but they told me not to ask questions. I never learned his name, but I never forgot him. To me he was the little boy from Antibes. We were so young. He was my height. He wore long pants, a shirt under his jacket. He had dark curly hair.

(The Cadusseaus's gave me a picture of the boy and me sitting on a bench. Long after the war I found the picture of him in an old picture box. My hair is cut short, my white knees showing between the skirt and the long socks. We look so much alike sitting there with a smile on our faces and our hands on our knees.)

Whenever we met, we looked at each other without speaking. Beside “Bonjour” and “Au Revoir” we were afraid to talk. What can two children talk about, if not their parents, brother, sister, friends or extended family? I remember sitting on the white bench, both of us swinging

our legs, which were too short to reach the floor. Now and then we glanced at each other shyly from the corners of our eyes. We would start to say something but quickly stopped ourselves.

Once in a while, to break our silence, the adults would come out and bring a geography book with colorful maps and we would read aloud the names of the principal cities in the world. One of the adults would stay with us a little while and show us how to read the maps.

I remember that little boy very well. He has stayed in my mind all my life. We liked each other. We were the same. We did not have other friends our age. We could not go to school to meet other kids. We had to leave our families, did not know where anyone was and were in hiding with different names. We could not talk about our past life; it simply could not exist. We were alone in a world we could not comprehend.

I think we both were a little happier when we were together, even if we did not talk much. One day Maurice told me that we could not visit the little boy and his family anymore. The boy and the family were picked up by the Nazis during a night raid. The boy, desperate for his mother, had written his real name and current address in his monthly letter to her. That had given him and the family away. The person picking up the mail for the OSE was arrested and shot. The Nazis sifted through the mail and picked up everyone that was mentioned. The adults hiding the little boy were arrested and sent to the death camp with him.

But I remained hidden and stayed alive.

Life became quieter. I was not allowed out. Maurice and Raymonde still operated the pharmacy every day. During lunch they talked about what was happening in Antibes. They repeated stories they'd heard from their customers: people apprehended on the streets, arrested

without any cause. Some of these people returned and some did not. I listened and came to understand why they were talking in front of me. They wanted me to know what was going on so I would be careful. They wanted me to be alert to the reality of what might happen any day.

I burrowed into my little windowless room and stayed there as much as the Cadusseau's permitted me to. I felt safe inside those four walls. They reminded me of the convent's small cell. While I was in the convent I had not known the dangers of being a Jewish child on the run.

My life was unpredictable on a daily basis. I tried to make sense of it all while sitting on the carpet in my little room. The world was crazy and dangerous. Where was my family? Would I ever see them again, to just open a door and find them all sitting down for dinner? That's all I wanted.

I kept repeating my real name and address in Paris silently in my head in case one day I had to go back there alone. I kept on asking myself why was this happening . Was I because I was Jewish? I just knew I had to be good, or I would not be allowed to stay there. Much later I realized that the Cadusseau's had risked their lives in order to hide me. Over the years I would often wonder why they had done it. I learned then that Maurice was in the Resistance and that he was the driving force behind my being there. Raymonde was always ambivalent. She was much more afraid of the consequences than her husband was, but she respected his wishes.

I spent many evenings in the study room. The walls were covered with dark wood; the desk was filled with books, maps and pharmaceutical journals. The desk lamp cast a pale shadow in the midst of darkness and the window was covered with heavy curtains so that lights could not be seen from the outside. I did my homework there. I studied history and the geography of France. Maurice was a kind, patient teacher. Raymonde was much sterner. After

my studies, I could choose a book and read. I liked to look at pictures of animals. Sitting on the carpet, my head against Maurice's knee, I forgot for a moment to be afraid. He read his journals and talked with Raymonde about what he was reading. Those times in the study were the best I experienced in Antibes. I felt less frightened and more like a child who belonged. Raymonde would bring a drink for Maurice and a glass of milk for me. The apartment was always kept dark. There were a few lights, just enough so that we would not bump into the furniture.

The pharmacy was closed on Sundays and we ventured outdoors. We walked like shadows, hovering near the walls of the buildings until we reached the promenade stretching along the sea. Other people strolled by. I loved looking at the sea. I learned to love the sand and the ocean. I would sit down in the cold sand, taking off my shoes. The gentle motion of the waves rolled in at a slow tempo and caressed my feet. It was late in the day and the sun had gone to bed. I smelled the iodine of the seaweed that was scattered about. I sat there under the luminous sky until the brilliant moon and the stars filled it. Then the Cadusseau's called to me that it was time to go home.

I would always take the opportunity to run to the beach if they asked me to do an errand. They told me to be careful and not stop for anything or anyone. But being a child and feeling the sense of freedom, I always snuck down to the seaside. I sat on the deserted beach for a few stolen minutes under a brilliant sun and a blue sky, hugging myself, feeling the warm and wet sand. It engulfed me like a mother holding her child. I forgot for a minute where I was. A sudden noise—voices on the beach—often broke the spell and I ran home.

We settled into a quiet routine. I was not unhappy. I was not allowed to go to school. I did not mind, as I always worried about people asking me questions. I escaped being singled

out. The Cadusseau's were good to me.

Maurice opened the pharmacy every day. I went with him some mornings and stayed a few hours. I watched him prepare potions and place pills in small containers behind the counter. Raymonde was in the store taking care of business.

Food was scarce and Raymonde would go to see a friendly farmer. I loved going with her. We walked on a dirt road beside the countryside. Roads were lined with pine trees, so green with fragrant mimosas, flowers only found in the South, little yellow flowers that looked like bees, gathering nectar on their small branches. When we arrived at the farm, I remained in the courtyard, chasing chickens. Raymonde went inside to buy food. She emerged with a bag of potatoes and a bag of fava beans. Sometimes she was able to purchase a chicken and we had a great meal.

One day the Cadusseau's and I were having lunch. Suddenly there was a knock at the outside door followed by loud pounding. Raymonde went to answer, closing the dining room door behind her. The bulldog, Coquette, barked at the noise so I could not hear anything. Maurice raised his eyebrows at the racket and told me to keep eating while he tried to quiet the dog.

Raymonde came back into the room and asked Maurice to come with her to the door. I was left along in the dining room with the barking dog and the closed door. I could not hear a sound of what was happening outside.

Maurice and Raymonde called to me to come to the front door. Framed in the doorway, standing tall was a young man. He had black hair and black eyes, a beret on his head, a blue, white and red bandanna around his neck, a blue uniform, and high boots. A big submachine gun

hung over his shoulders. A wide grin slowly spread over his face when he saw me. I stood mesmerized by that fierce-looking soldier, gazing up at him. My eyes traveled from his dusty boots up to his smiling face. There was a scar on his right cheek. It was like a bolt of lightning. I had pushed his face far back in my memory.

My mother, father and my brother came alive to me, my entire previous life. I stood there stupefied as the rush of images came into my mind.

The young man looked down at me and said, "Greta, Gitele, is it you, really you?" And he grabbed me in his arms and fiercely squeezed me against him.

"Are you all right? Talk to me. I am your brother."

I was speechless. To hear my real name spoken out loud! I wanted to tell him not to say it. I was afraid. Perhaps some Germans were lurking in the back and they'd come and snatch me away. I looked at the Cadusseau's. They stood there watching and smiling.

I raised my eyes to my brother's face again and my heart moved.

I was so unprepared. I had been forbidden to remember my past. I wasn't ready to suddenly accept that my life might change yet again. I had molded myself to a new life as Ginette. After tweaking my cheeks, he put me down and went down on his knees to talk to me.

He said that soon we were all going to be reunited in Paris. He thought that my mother was hiding in a farm. He would try to find out where she was. As soon as Paris was liberated, she would probably travel back to the city and wait for one of us to reappear. He had no news from our father or from the rest of the family. The silence about their whereabouts was total. He did not elaborate.

He told me that the army was marching towards Paris and as soon as the war ended, all of the hidden children would be sent back to the parents who claimed them. My brother said “A bientot, in Paris,” blew me a kiss, saluted the Cadusseaus's, thanked them for saving my life and returned to his platoon. I watched the army detachment that had accompanied him on his march file out into the street. They all saluted us and left singing an army song. I still see those young men in blue marching out from the town on their way to liberate the country.

I was numb for a while; I kept on rewinding the tape of his visit in my head again and again. I had a hard time believing that it had actually happened.

I had seen a ghost from my past, alive and kicking, full of zest. After the war he would tell me that he hardly recognized me: a little waif with short hair and a frightened expression, standing stiffly before him and gazing at him with a solemn face-- a face that had forgotten that laughter was still a part of life. He said that I looked so distraught that he felt frightened that I would not believe who he was.

I was going to be reunited with my mother and brother, and soon. He had promised. But where was my father?

Maurice spoke to me in his gentle way after my brother had gone. He told me I would soon be back with my family. I was quiet. I had to take hold of this new development in my life. Later, in my little room, before I went to sleep I prayed on my knees and did my rosary. I prayed that what had happened was actually true and that I would see my family again.

I waited for another life to begin. My brother's visit seemed like a dream. Perhaps I would wake up in the morning and find that it had never happened. I played back his visit at night in my bed, the covers up to my chin. Going over every detail of his visit, still not sure.

My brother's face kept dancing in front of my eyes. My mother and father appeared too.

Meanwhile, life in wartime continued. We had to run to the shelter several times when planes flew low. I do not remember any bombing.

Rumors circulated that the allies were winning the war.

Maurice listened to the BBC every night. He told me of the Resistance and that he thought the end of the war was near. Sometimes we heard gunshots in the night and people running. I was afraid and stayed in my room, waiting for it to end.

I had to wait and see. I always wondered why the Cadussau's risked their lives taking in a Jewish child. Much later, when the Cadusseau's, the sisters at the convent and all of those who helped were given recognition as the Righteous Gentiles. I understood that they felt that protecting Jews was the right thing to do and they would have been ashamed if they had not done so.

After my brother left, I still never spoke to anyone about my real parents or my life in Paris. I kept thinking about the convent and the sisters. I sat on the warm sand, looking out into the emerald sea and realized I was not a child anymore. I had not been given the chance to be a child for very long. My short passage from childhood to adulthood had been so rapid that I had lost everything relating to be a child. I could not remember ever playing with toys; I never had a doll or a stuffed animal.

Yet I was not an adult either. I was caught in the middle, coping with questions. I was an eleven-year old and did not know where I belonged. Now that I was allowed to be Greta again and not Ginette, I had flashes of memories. The most recurring image was that of two men in black trench coats holding guns that came into my life and took my father away. They took

my beloved Yidele.

In the meantime, things were not good between Raymonde and Maurice. They had ceased to be a couple. He moved out. He had found another woman. He came in every day to work in the pharmacy and stayed sometimes for lunch or dinner. I kept out of sight. There were loud conversations behind closed doors. Doors were sometimes slammed hard. I heard them talking about me. Raymonde said, "When are we getting rid of her?" Maurice replied, "Don't be so loud; that child has already had a very difficult life. We don't even know if there's any family left beside her brother. I want to make sure she returns to Paris as soon as possible. Meanwhile we have to be nice to her."

I was very frightened. Where were they going to send me? I did not have anywhere else to go. My brother's visit and his promises were receding fast in my memory. I did not fully understand that the war was over. I just felt that I was going to be abandoned. I knew that Raymonde did not like me very much but she had taken good care of me and Maurice had been very kind. It took me a long time to fall asleep. I kept hearing Raymonde's words: "When are we going to get rid of her?"

In the morning I did not want to get out from under my blanket. I was afraid of what the new day would bring. They called me in for breakfast. I sat down in front of my plate of food and put my hands under the table. I was trembling and I did not want them to know it. I could not eat. I just sat there looking at my food. I was afraid to look at them, not knowing what to expect.

Maurice extended his hand and took one of mine. He said he had a few things to tell me. I nodded my head but remained silent. He had been in contact with the O.S.E. I would be

leaving for Paris as soon as the trains started running. I shook my head in denial. I did not want to go anywhere. I wanted to stay there with them. He listened patiently. My eyes silently filled with tears. No one wanted me. I was going to be sent to another place, with other people. I had been shipped around so many times. I did not know who I was and did not know where I was going to be sent to. What could I do? Nothing. I was a little girl and had to follow orders. Maurice continues to speak. He and Raymonde were going to separate. He would not be staying in the apartment but he would come to see me every day and he would still be working at the pharmacy. He said that my brother would be waiting for me in Paris.

After that day, I was left to my own devices most of the time. Raymonde and Maurice were busy unraveling their own lives. Raymonde was in a nasty mood all the time, barely speaking to me, but still making sure that I had food to eat on a regular basis. I tried to keep away from her as much as I could. Somehow, I thought, she blamed me for what was happening to her marriage. Maurice came to see me every day.

We tried to go over some lessons, but my thoughts were elsewhere and everything he said just flew over my head. Raymonde had stopped teaching me. When Maurice asked why, she said, "What for? She's going to be out of our lives soon. Let the rest of the world teach her."

I spent my days on the beach collecting shells and sitting on the sand. There were other kids that tried to talk to me but I was not ready to play with anyone. After a while they stopped talking to me, which suited me fine. I was thinking about the coming trip; going back to Paris. Seeing my brother again. I wondered if my mother and father would be there. I concocted different scenarios in my head, but the only thing I really knew was that my brother would be there. I waited for the day when I would be leaving, waited with dread and anticipation. I was

not sure that I wanted to go back. I did not know what to expect but I knew I had no choice. My life in Antibes with the Cadusseaus's had been quiet and predictable. Now I faced the unknown again.

Life stayed the same until the French underground [F.F.I.: Forces Francaises de l'Interieur] and the American army joined forces and marched toward Paris. I was told that I would be sent back on the first train leaving for Paris. Raymonde was all business. She impassively helped me pack my meager bag with the clothing she had bought me. I still had my rosary beads, which I hid in my pocket. Maurice took my bag. He said we were going to meet the O.S.E. staff at the station along with other kids like myself. We would all travel together.

It was early morning and the sun was up. Raymonde gave me a pat on the head and pushed me out in the street, not too gently. Maurice took my hand and we started walking toward the station. I kept looking back; I had had some good times at the pharmacy playing with the big jars of candies and helping Maurice in the back office. The day was warm and sunny; the trees were green and there were flowers everywhere. Lots of people milled around, talking loudly and laughing. It was as if a veil had been lifted from the world. Maurice was smiling. People saluted him. I hung on his hand as we walked a frown on my face. He said not to worry; the war was over and I would be reunited with my family. He said that I had been a good little girl and he hoped that he would see me again.

He pulled me gently in the direction of the station. I was on my way to a new life again. Would my mother and father be waiting for me as well as my brother? Would I recognize them? Would they recognize me? It seemed as if I had left all of them such a long time ago.

I didn't want to let go of Maurice's hand; it was the last thread connecting me to a life I

had lived for a long time.

Chapter Fourteen: Leaving Antibes

We arrived at the train station. There were adults and children, chaos, pandemonium. Bags were tossed on the ground. I held on to my small bag. I felt a physical stab of fear going through my body.

Maurice gently disengaged his hand from mine, kissed me on both cheeks twice, and guided me into the hands of a young woman from the O.S.E. She rushed me towards a train door. I could not see Maurice anymore; he disappeared in the pushing and jostling crowds beside the train. I did not know anyone. I was a grain of sand left behind waiting for a wave to wash me away. The young woman could not pull me inside the door of the train. Children were packed in like sardines. Some young men lifted me and pushed me into a train car through an open window. They threw my little bag in after me. The train was filled with people and kids with packages thrown all over the car. There was no seat. I managed to find a corner and sat down on the floor. Someone handed me a sandwich and a drink. There were many children, the hidden children who had survived and were going home to their families—perhaps. No one knew for sure. The children were crying, some of them so choked with fear that they could not speak.

There was a loud whistle and the train started to move. It would take a day and night before we arrived in Paris. I ate my sandwich and sat by myself for the duration of the trip, twirling my beads.

The train finally came to a halt. We had arrived at the railroad station of Gare de Lyon. The train doors opened. The crowd moved forward but they were restrained by the police and the barricades. I looked out and did not see anyone I knew. I saw many women with their hands clasped tightly over their chests.

A woman in charge stood on a box. She told us to be quiet and started calling out names. With each name, a parent moved up in front, and a child moved forward too. It was like a silent ballet. No one spoke; they did not know each other any longer and the distance between them felt like a burst of cold air. The child was not willing to relinquish his bundle from the past, holding on to it with great force as if holding on to a raft. Then the children and their parents were all weeping.

The young woman was calling out names and she had already reached the last sheet of paper. I had not heard my name yet. My throat was constricted. Tears were gathering in my eyes and I could not see. I was devastated. Then my name was called. I did not respond. I did not recognize the name they were calling. I knew only one name; Ginette Henry. And they called Greta Herensztat. I did not move. They called again. Suddenly a young man with jet black hair came flying through the crowd, shouting my name over and over again, grabbed me, lifted me in the air, gave me a bear hug and said "Greta, remember, I told you I would be waiting for you in Paris. I am your brother Bernard. Look here, girl, and this is your mother." I looked at the older woman and I did not recognize her. My brother pulled me by the hand and my mother followed, without saying a word.

My mother had seen my unsmiling face and did not try to talk to me. She understood how I felt after all those years of being away from her. I thought she had abandoned me and left

me alone to fend for myself. I looked back at the platform still crowded with unclaimed children. I was spoken for, but what if some of those other children were not claimed? What would happen to them? And what about the parents, who would not find their children?

Looking at my brother and my mother, I finally realized that yes; I belonged to someone, that I was not alone in the world. I was somebody. My name was Greta.

Chapter Fifteen: Return to Paris

Walking fast, my hand secured in my brother's, we left the station with its yelling and crying, a babble of tongues behind us. My mother walked behind us. We took a bus. I sat in front of my mother. Darting glances at her, wondering if this woman with brown hair, brown eyes with dark circles all around them, her face a tired grayish color, her mouth closed with pinched lips, was really my mother. I still did not actually recognize her. She now sat across from us, her hands folded in her lap. Did she really want me back now? My mother was so quiet. I suddenly understood with a jolt of recognition: I was going home with my brother and my mother. I said in a small voice, "Where is Papa?" My brother looked at me and said, "We don't know yet. The camps have just been liberated and nobody knows." I still did not know what the word "camp" meant.

1945: the end of the war, the beginning of a new life. Paris had just been liberated. I was still so young and had a hard time understanding what had happened from 1939 to 1945. I was twelve years old and had been separated from my family for about three years.

I did not say a word. I would have to wait and see. My brother told me that Aunt Esther was in Paris and so was Uncle Chaim, but he was not friendly with my mother. We did not have our apartment back yet, and so we were going to live in a hotel, "le Malte rue de Crussol," which was just a short distance from our apartment.

I learned that 80,000 Jews from "La belle France" had been deported due to the active collaboration of the French people. I thought hard about it and remembered the people who I thought were my friends, turning away from me in the early 1940s.

My mother was always waiting, waiting for my father to come back. She always said, “Maybe he escaped; perhaps he's a prisoner of war somewhere; maybe he survived the camp and when he was liberated by the Russian Army, he was taken to a displaced person's camp. Perhaps he is waiting for his papers and a ticket to travel back to us.”

In May we visited the Hotel Lutetia, located on the Boulevard Raspail on the left bank of Paris. The hotel was prepared to receive liberated civilians returning from the concentration camps: Jews, political prisoners and resisters. A disinfectant was used to spray the returnees with DDT. We waited for hours, searching for my father. Inside the hotel, tables were set up with food for all of the skeletal people arriving daily. Many were still dressed in their striped concentration camp garb. They could barely walk. Special food was prepared for them that were easily digested. They could not swallow rich food after years of eating only bread and water. Some wanted to leave immediately. They were given identification cards, ration booklets, money and clothes. Those who were too feeble were transferred to hospitals. Occasionally a lucky person would find a member of his or her family and the reunion was heartbreaking to watch.

We kept looking for my father. My mother would walk back and forth to a bulletin board where there were notices of missing persons, often with pictures attached.

I was frightened and my mother told my brother to take me back home. She would stay. Every time a new convoy, arrived people rushed to see if they could recognize a father, mother or child. It was a terrible sight. But my mother endured. She told us she would keep going back until the last day. This lasted a few months. The recovery effort was coming to an end. But my mother never lost hope that her “Yidele” would somehow manage to return.

Even after an official notice arrived in mail informing us that my father had died in Auschwitz—his name was recorded on the official list left by the Nazis—my mother refused to believe it. She kept on waiting. Her life was on hold, and so was ours.

Reality was slowly settling in. My brother kept telling her to stop dreaming and start living again. She had a few opportunities to meet men, those who came back from concentration camps. They had lost their wives and children and wanted to emigrate and start a new life. She always said no. She said to them, “No, thank you, I am waiting for Yidele to come back.”

She kept on waiting. And I did too.

Getting the apartment back took longer than expected. The people living in it did not want to leave. They had moved in during the German occupation. Every Jewish home was to be occupied by French citizens. The French refused to leave the apartments they had taken from Jewish tenants, selling their priceless possessions. They did not want to turn over businesses which really belonged to Jewish owners. We felt their icy stares when we dared to reclaim what was rightfully ours. We heard them question why we were back; they thought “Hitler had killed them all.” My brother had to legally fight them and this was taking a long time. He said he was not sure that we were going to get the apartment back. I said the apartment was ours and we should get it back. He smirked at me and said that anti-Semitism was alive and well. I did not understand the word. I looked up at him but his face was tense. I stopped asking questions.

I was sent to live with my Aunt Esther and her husband, Uncle Mietek. Esther was my mother's sister. I had not attended school since 1942 but I knew how to read. I now enrolled at school. It was a nice neighborhood, “Les Buttes Chaumont,” near a pretty park.

I stayed a whole school year with my uncle and aunt. My uncle was tough, a disciplinarian. When he was young he had gone to the Polish school and academy for future soldiers. With the arrival of the Nazis, he decided to leave while he could and go to Paris. He started a sweater factory. My uncle met my aunt and they lived during the war years without being persecuted.

I remember a herd of goats with their master coming around the corner. He would ring his bell and we would go down and buy milk and cheese. And I remember the knife and scissors grinder passing with his cart. We would call to him to stop under our window and run downstairs with the utensils. We shopped at the open market where the numbers on the weight scales were written in Roman numerals. We would buy fresh pasta and vegetables and fish. I did not like to go near the fish display because of their open eyes. I thought they were staring at me. I did not like the display of pigs' heads and the parsley inserted in their nostrils. Going back home, my aunt would cook up a storm in that little kitchen of hers. My bed was a folding chair in a corner.

I went to school and then was accepted at the "Lycee Victor Hugo, rue de Sevigne" in the Marais. It was all-girls high school. I was very far behind, and my uncle, who had a degree in engineering from a university in Poland and spoke French fluently, helped me. It was very difficult for me to learn new things and I was unhappy most of the time.

The battle to get our own apartment back went on and finally, at the end of a year, my mother was allowed to move back in. I went to live with my mother and brother. My father was still missing, and over time I came to know the meaning of the "camps."

I remember returning to our old apartment where so many things had happened, but I did not talk about them. I wanted to forget and be a teenager.

I studied Latin, but I was not good at it. I was proficient in French grammar and literature. On Saturdays we walked through Paris. We would listen to an accordionist playing and singing for a few centimes. A clothing merchant sold rags, old shoes and odd pieces of paper, all of which were balanced atop a cart which he pulled behind him while hawking his wares through the streets. It all created a symphony of pleasant lively noises. We were used to the singsong of all the street vendors and could recognize each one of them. If one was absent, the singsong symphony was missing a voice.

Sundays we went to visit with Aunt Esther and Uncle Mietek . We would spend the day in the “Buttes Chaumont,” a large park with wonderful places to sit or walk amid magnificent trees and gorgeous flowers. There was a “guignol,” a very funny puppet show for the children. At the end of the show we bought crepes flavored with sugar from a vendor's cart.

By evening we took our leave and went home on the subway. I was 13 now; a teenager growing up without any counsel, no one to look up to or talk to. I tried to stay invisible, as I had done during the war. My mother was busy trying to feed and clothe us; my brother was rearranging his life and chasing girls. I would meet friends at a cafe near the Place de la Republique, the center of Paris with a big statue in the center, merry-go-rounds for the younger kids and a square filled with iron chairs, flowers and trees.

I always felt that my mother was like a stranger, almost an enemy. I did not have feelings for her. At best, we had a difficult relationship with no warmth. I had changed without her knowledge; she left behind a very young child and gotten in return a rebellious girl.

I was filled with panic, always an outsider, never fitting in anywhere. I had no confidence at all. I showed a straight unsmiling face to strangers.

I began to date and to fall in with a different crowd. I went dancing in the Latin Quarter. Someone told my mother that they had seen me in one of the clubs drinking, dancing and smoking. And listening to Roy Eldridge. I was grounded and punished.

I also had conflicts with my brother regarding the church. I would sometimes go to a church for religious services, wanting to recapture the feelings I had in the convent. I prayed and did my rosary. A neighbor saw me. My brother went ballistic and I was punished for it.

My mother registered me in a Jewish club called "Les Cadets." I went regularly and soon met lifelong friends and the boy who would become my husband.

Life had returned to normal. Once again we had Sunday dinners at my aunts and at our apartment. My mother and brother worked together and money was coming in. My brother wanted to play, to shine with girls and with his friends. He bought a big shiny car, a white convertible with leather upholstery. He took me to my youth club activities. All my friends came out and whistled with admiration.

The car was always parked in front of our apartment building. Our street was narrow and short and the car took a big bite out of the space. My brother wanted to catch a glimpse of the car from our first floor window. He loved that car, his first taste of freedom; it was a great vehicle to pick up girls. One late evening, while we were home, the windows were closed but we heard a strange noise outside. Soon we could see black smoke floating up from the street. My brother ran to the window. His beautiful white car was burning. We never found out who did it. But according to the police, it was a deliberate act.

Some people in the neighborhood were jealous of the Jews. We had just returned, still alive, and already the Jew boy had an American car to play with. It was unheard of. They were going to show us that we were still in their grip.

The next year my brother brought another car, and we kept on living there despite the feeling that we were not wanted. During that time my brother tried to find the person who had denounced my father to the French militia during the war. The man had died just at the end of the war and my brother's search for vengeance stopped there.

I felt like a zombie, that my new life with my mother and brother was unreal, a dream. I kept on waiting for everything to be swept away. I really wanted to return to the convent, where I had been loved and safe for a while. I took refuge now in silence, much as I had during the time I was in hiding. I was always afraid. Hidden children stay hidden. They put on a mask and hide behind it.

Then I became very sick from malnutrition. I developed abscesses all over my body and had to go to a clinic to have them lanced. This continued for several months and would not abate, and the doctors decided to treat me with large doses of penicillin. I was admitted to the hospital and remained there for two weeks until I began to improve. I returned home and went back to school. Then I became sick again with the first stage of tuberculosis. I had to drop out of school. In the end I was cured and sent to a sanatorium for several months to fully recover.

I tried to study in school again, but the many months of illness had disoriented me. After another unsuccessful year in school I made the decision, against my mother's wishes, to quit school and find a job. I was apprenticed to a dentist. I learned the trade for six months and obtained a paying job.

Nothing is the same after a war. People change. But hidden children stay hidden. They put on a mask and hide behind it. Even after a whole life has been lived, the sufferings of those formative years are still there. The horror of what happened is still real. I never talked about the fate of my father with anyone. It will always be tortuously coiled inside me. I am obsessed with those images.

Whenever the family met, no one talked about the war. No one wanted to learn about what had happened to us. I still felt abandoned by my mother because she had left me to live with strangers. It took me a long time to understand and forgive. There was always a small kernel of distrust on my part, and life was not easy between us. She did not know how to bridge the gap between us and I was a sullen girl, not wanting to open up with her. I was never free from the war. I had stayed silent and obedient in order to save my life. Later on I never stood up for my rights. I assumed that I did not have any. I always obeyed my elders.

I was a sad child and I grew up a sad young girl. I carried sadness with me always and I was without forgiveness. Those who survived remembered the ones who did not. They all tried to live the best they could. I would never learn how to be happy. I would go through life putting on a bland face, a false smile so people would not ask questions. I tried to forget the fact that because I was a Jewish child, some people wanted me dead. I could not understand it when I was young. After the war I tried to close up all my memories and throw away the key. We, the hidden children, were not permitted to forget. We are in some ways the escapees. We have to bear witness to the horror of that war on children.

Now I want the children of the world to know how a young girl felt during that terrible time. The Nazis inflicted their vision on the world like a spreading disease, and it appears to be a disease that is incurable. It is still spreading. France was on a mission to deal with the Jewish question. A French militia was formed led by Petain, Laval and Darnaud, as well as Henriot, Doriot and others too numerous to mention. They were doing the work of the Gestapo and they were not Germans; they were French. They were entirely aware of the concentration camps.

I did not experience the death camps, the fear, the blows or the dogs. I did not smell, day in and day out, the acrid smoke of burning flesh. I was just a lost little girl, always afraid, without parents or family, not knowing where I would be going from one day to the next. The whole world seems to have forgotten how so many stood by and looked away when the gas chambers went into action.

In a small, hidden part of me, I am always waiting, hoping beyond reason that a door will open and my father will be there, framed in the doorway. I always look at the backs of strange men who might resemble my father. I have not buried him. He will only disappear when I do.

It has taken me a lifetime to try to confront my memories. There was a wall of silence, a paralysis, a solid gray wall which I could not breach. I was not able to mourn my father. Perhaps I thought that if I did not talk or even think about his disappearance, I would keep him alive in my heart—and perhaps he would reappear. I could not accept the idea of his death in such horrific circumstances.

There is no tomb to go to visit, just a document, a list from Auschwitz with his name on it. He just vanished into thin air.

“My father was killed in Auschwitz.”

Just to say those words wounds me again and again. In 1945 only 3% of survivors came back from the brink from the 76,600 deported Jews from France alone. My childhood was destroyed. I was and am the daughter of a father who was exterminated. How can one grasp this infamy done to ordinary people whose only uniqueness was the fact that they were Jews?

The images remain: the night the soldiers came for us, my mother and I hiding in that little room on the top floor, and did not find us. The march through small villages and meadows, the trains and buses we took to escape. My mother chasing away rats, trying to make a meal out of me, hitting them away with her brown bag.

On balmy days, upon our return to Paris, my mother would stand at the window's small balcony in the dining room, looking down at the street. I knew, by looking at her tense posture, that she was still waiting for that bell to ring and for my father to be standing in the doorway. She had been 45 years old when her life toppled. Her spirit was broken. I can only imagine my mother's terrible memories.

At 60, she had a massive heart attack. I am sorry now that I was not nicer to my mother. Intellectually I came to understand why my mother did what she did, but inside the heart of a child is a fear so intense you cannot explain it. The instant of separation, the sound of the door closing in the priest's chamber is imprinted within me. All those years spent alone made me feel like a pearl attached to its own oyster, so well-closed that no one could open it.

When my mother died, there was no more time to make amends with her.

In 1948, Raymonde Cadusseau, my savior during the war, had invited me for a month's vacation in Antibes. I did not understand why she wanted to see me; she had been so aloof

during the war. Her husband, Maurice, was the nurturing one. She had always seemed mechanical and not really interested in me. Yet I still owed her a debt of gratitude; without her help and her husband I would not have survived.

When I arrived in Antibes, Maurice was not there. I already knew that they had divorced at the end of the war, just about the time I returned to Paris. She told me that Maurice had married the woman who, with her husband, had taken care of the little boy who was arrested after he had given his real address in a letter. The woman's husband and the little boy were murdered. She survived and returned after being liberated from the camps.

Later on I came to understand that Maurice had had an affair with the young woman. They had both worked for the Resistance during the war. Meanwhile Raymonde had met and married another pharmacist and they owned a pharmacy together. Raymonde did not know where Maurice was or perhaps she did not want to tell me.

She had changed or perhaps reverted to her real self. She and her new husband were rabid anti-semites. They felt that there would have been no war if it were not for the Jews. I was too young to follow their "reasoning," but I was very uneasy staying with them.

Raymonde's feelings came out in the open. She really did not like me. She did not say so but I could feel it. Yet she and Maurice had saved my life.

I traveled back to Paris knowing that my association with her was over.

I wrote a note thanking her and her husband for having invited me. I never heard them from again. I sent cards on the holidays over the years but they never answered. My mother told me to stop writing them. I never heard from Maurice or learned what had happened to him. I was fourteen and I wanted to forget all those memories. I wanted to have fun. I wanted to play.

The months went by. My father was not coming back.

He became a puff of smoke over the sky and had floated down like gray powder at
Auschwitz.

Chapter Sixteen: My Brother Bernard, After

I married my husband Charles in 1953 and we had a baby girl. My husband started a small leather business at home, and we both worked at it. Life was very difficult for us in Paris. In 1956, my husband's uncle and aunt in America offered him papers if he wanted to immigrate to the United States. He went first in 1959. Six months later papers arrived for me and my daughter. We arrived in New York in February, 1960.

I worked as Vice Principal of the Lycee Francais in Manhattan from 1960 through 1973. That year I left the school to pursue my studies in education I earned a B.A.-M.A. in Comparative Literature, French and Spanish. But I needed work quickly, and found a position as a salesperson at Saks Fifth Avenue in 1976. The years folded into one another and took on a semblance of normalcy. I was promoted to manager and worked at the store for 25 years. After retiring from Saks I took a teaching position in a private school. I taught French and Latin for five years and finally retired in order to finish my memoirs.

My brother Bernard died in Paris on July 4, 2001. I received the phone call about his passing on July 5th, and flew to Paris the next day. The funeral was on July 9th. My only brother was gone. I felt numb, as if someone had removed a limb. There was no one left from my past.

My brother and I were not close; he did not understand my life. We lived so far away from one another.

I would never see him again sitting in his favorite armchair, feet propped up on a stool, not talking much but listening carefully. He had the knack of cutting through the words I would say, piercing my defenses. He understood what was not said out loud, and he had that ironic, knowing smile on his lips. He would shake his head but said little.

My brother had arrived in France from Poland in late 1928 with my parents. He'd been tall and skinny, with a full head of black hair and black eyes twinkling with mischief.

He read a lot and was considered the intellectual in the family. He was highly opinionated and had a rough, stubborn personality. He was a ferocious agnostic. He did not like many people. He liked to provoke people and then sit back and wait for their reaction with an ironic smile on his face. He liked to think he knew everything. The only time he softened was when he had a grandson. He was the best grandfather I ever met.

For me he was the knight in shining armor that appeared one day in Antibes to let me know that I was not lost. He came back and took me home to my family and retrieved my real name from the obscure past.

I would return to visit him in Paris every few years. Our communication faded over the years. He never called me on the phone; I did the calling. His wife Tetelle would call.

During the last summer I saw him; I think he knew he was dying. He was sick with diabetes. He'd had a heart attack the previous year and was suddenly diagnosed with lung cancer. He smoked all his life. In that last year, I asked him about our family's history and he finally opened up about his life.

He told me how he had been thrown into the maelstrom of war at 16. He had adapted totally to France and thought of himself as French. He talked about suddenly becoming

responsible for my mother and I after my father was taken away by the Nazis. He told me of searching for a job so that he could buy us food. All the assets of Jews had been frozen in the bank. He talked about how he escaped the Velodrome d'hiver round-up by hiding in the metro. He described how he had been picked up in the street following the round-up and sent to a work camp near Paris. He had been overcome with worry about me and my mother while in the camp and he had escaped and run for his life.

He had visited our old apartment and found the door locked and sealed. He did not know that my mother and I had fled together. His first thought was that we had been arrested and sent to a camp. He left Paris with the determination to connect with the underground and fight the Nazis.

He joined the "Maquisards Du Vercors," an important French underground army of partisans in 1944 and talked about his harrowing experience high in the mountains, one of the harshest terrains for guerrilla warfare. The army became an important part of the resistance, thanks to the active help and complicity of the region's inhabitants.

On July 21, 1944, the Vercors region was encircled by the Nazis and the French military. They surrounded the mountainous region and killed approximately 600 guerilla fighters, and the people in the villages were brutally repressed. This was the price all the combatants and the villagers paid for liberty.

My brother told me that this was the most grueling period of the war for him. He saw his companions, young boys, and fall around him like figures on a checker board. The Nazis killed whomever they could find and went on to annihilate entire villages. He related one near-death experience he went through. The partisans were fighting with some Nazi soldiers and winning.

But when the Nazis retreated they suddenly aimed a volley of bullets back at the partisans. A young man, my brother's friend, was hit and died on the spot. A few minutes later, my brother discovered that the bullet that killed his friend shot out of his side pocket. It grazed him, but on its way went straight into the chest of his friend.

Those who survived escaped through the mountains and joined the F.F.I. (French Army of Resistance).

It was at this time, at the end of 1944, that my brother came to Antibes and found me.

When we spoke, I realized there were many things he had not told me. Because of the delicate state of his health, I did not press him and accepted whatever he was capable of giving me. The next question in my mind, a source of puzzlement to me over the years, was the feud between him and my uncle.

The conversation started with my brother referring to my uncle in a derogatory way. I was silent, and waited. I knew he was about to tell me. He filled in all the missing pieces of my uncle's betrayal.

My brother told me that just before the family dispersed, they held a meeting where they told each other how they were going to try to avert being arrested. My uncle had arranged through underground channels to slip into Switzerland with his family, and told my mother and my brother about it. If we could all meet him at a certain date in Megeve, which was close to the border, we would be able to escape into Switzerland. The Swiss government had offered a safe haven for families with small children. My uncle had a small child, my cousin Michel, still a baby. And my mother had me. My brother would have to make it on his own; he would try to reach Megeve and somehow find a way to get to Switzerland.

According to my brother, we all managed to get to Megeve and to meet with my uncle and his family. I remembered the morning following the discussion about our methods of escape, when all three of us—my mother, brother and myself—went up to my uncle's rooms and discovered that my uncle and his family had left on their own without leaving a clue as to their whereabouts.

My brother knew immediately that my uncle had left for Switzerland, abandoning his sister and children.

My brother got upset recounting this. I had repressed these memories. Now I remembered the way my mother had looked when she realized that her brother had left her behind with her children. She had stood there, riveted to the floor in that silent room, her face white as paper and her hands trembling. Now she would have to rethink her whole approach of evading the Nazis or the French. I was too young to understand what was going on at the time.

At that point my brother told my mother that he was going to join the underground and urged her to hide.

I remembered my brother leaving and my mother and myself running and hiding again.

“So,” my brother told me, “now you understand why I wanted nothing more to do with him, and did not want to speak to him for years after the war. And let me tell you something, my sister: he will outlive all of us. People like him have no heart. He is 96 and is still going strong while I am sick.”

I felt the bitterness in his voice.

My brother was so right. He is dead and my 97-year old uncle is still around. He has all his marbles. His eyesight and hearing are failing. When he does not want to hear, he does not

hear. I recently tried to ask him questions about his behavior during the war. When he chose to hear my question, his answer was always the same: "Why are you asking all these questions? It's over. There's no point in rehashing the past. Let it be."

My brother is gone. So is my mother. The only one alive is my uncle. I go and see him every time I am in France. No matter what he did, I know in my heart he has been punished. His two children, Michel and Marie-Claude, committed suicide at a young age.

After that conversation, my brother stopped talking. He became very sick again. I was flying back to New York the next day. When we said goodbye, he said, "I will see you next year and perhaps we will talk again."

I recall looking at him and seeing that ironic expression on his face and in his eyes. Now I think he was hiding the truth. He knew he would not see me again.

I left Paris on June 26, 2001. My brother died on July 4 of that year.

I did not know him well. The distance of miles separating us was too great. I always thought that he was unhappy with my living so far away from him. I was his little sister. He had been a good brother while I was growing up. But now it is over. There are two things about him in my mind which I shall hold forever. One is the memory I have of him standing in his uniform in the doorway at the Cadusseau's, looking down at me with a smile of victory. He had found his young sister against all odds.

The second thing is: he gave me back my name.

And so I will remember him forever.

Chapter Seventeen: Return to the Convent, The Miracle

I kept just a part of the promise I made to Sister Andrea in 1945 in 2003. I had promised to return to life in the convent. I could not actually do that. I was such a young girl then, easily impressed by convent life. My stay there had left a lasting impression. I realized that this place provided the peace and love which I had missed terribly all the years I spent alone without my family.

I went for a visit in 2003, accompanied by my daughter and granddaughter. I wanted to show them how I had lived for several years, protected and safe thanks to the goodness of some special people and also by my own wits. I wanted them to understand that among the men and women who crossed my path when I fled the Nazis; there were some who put their life in great danger to save Jewish children from their clutches.

We arrived at the station in Nice in heavy rain. We took the bus which climbed up the steep boulevard to Mount Cimix where the Convent of the Clarisses was located. Wherever we looked we saw the colors of the south of France, the blue coast: "La Cote D'Azur." Blue colors lit up each house, a blue like the sky when it does not rain. The houses had colorful shutters and canopies in blues, pinks, ochre and white, like eyelids.

We arrived at the "Sainte Colette" stop. I knew my way, and through the pelting rain we walked towards the convent. Soon, at the end of the narrow road, my daughter spotted the black iron doors. She stopped and said, "It's exactly as you described it: the black iron doors, the courtyard and the white chapel in the back."

I stopped and stood still, seeing, as if it was yesterday, the little girl and Sister Andrea walking about like ghosts slowly receding in the fog.

My daughter shook my arm and pushed me toward the low building on the right. We knocked at one of the glass doors where a light glowed. The door opened. We were expected. A sister led us into the dining room. Tea and cookies were laid out for us. She told us that Sister Marie Antoine would arrive later to greet us. She was the only remnant of the past.

She took us to our rooms in the bungalow. This was where I had slept during the war. The same emotions surged within me. I had been there in an earlier life.

We each had a single heated room. There was a bed with a crucifix hanging from the wall over the bed. There was a washbasin, an armchair, a wooden armoire, and a small desk with a shaded lamp. The lamp flickered over a bible and some pens and pencils. It all felt very familiar.

I stood at the window and looked out. Images from the past slowly rolled over me. There was the palm tree towering over the bungalow, still standing like a guardian. And at its foot, in a crook of the trunk, I saw the little girl I was then. This was the spot she preferred. She would sit there and confide her thoughts to the tree. Try to explain that she did not know why she was there. She would ask the tree to explain why her parents had disappeared. She would confide in the tree her real name and other things she was forbidden to disclose. The palm tree never betrayed her. It held her heavy secrets safely inside its palm heart. Now she gazed at her old friend, rooted to the earth and immutable in its calmness. Still keeping her childhood secrets.

The convent is now a retreat for women, renting its rooms to visitors. The sister came in with a pot of soup. Bread and wine were on the table. The guests were curious about us. We did not fit the profile of the usual guests.

While we were eating, the door opened and a very small nun flew into the room with her hands in the air asking “And where is our little Ginette?” She gazed around the table, her eyes surveying all the guests, and pointed a finger in my direction. I did not remember her. I was barely eleven when I lived at the convent and she must have been sixteen or seventeen. Like a bird she sauntered in my direction. I stood up and she took hold of my hands and, standing on the tips of her toes, she pulled me down to her level and planted kisses on both my cheeks. My two girls stood up and looked at her with surprise and joy. I told Sister Marie Antoine who they were. She clapped her hands excitedly and danced around us. She was a tiny whirlwind of joy, explaining to the other guests who we were. She told us to stay just where we were. She was going to bring the Mother Superior and the other sisters to us.

As soon as she left, a handful of nuns entered the room. There was a flurry of long robes and veils. Mother Superior came in with Sister Marie Antoine. The nuns sounded like birds twittering in a cage. Sister Marie Antoine introduced us and made a special mention of Hannah, my granddaughter, calling her “the miracle.” Hannah was pleased to be called that.

Sister Marie Antoine explained to the people around the table why she called Hannah a miracle. She told them about me, of my hiding in the convent and how I escaped the terrible fate of so many children. She said that because I survived and had come to visit with my family this was a miracle. I had a daughter; my daughter in turn had a daughter, and the very act of a third generation returning to the convent was simply, to her eyes, a miracle.

The next day we left to visit Nice and the Chagall museum and returned to the convent for dinner. Sister Marie Antoine showed us documents from the time I had hidden in the convent. She had a list of all the children who had passed through the convent during the war. I

looked closely and a name which I could not forget sprung right out at me from the list. It was my “war name,” Ginette Henry, and adjoining it, my real name. Printed right there in black on the white sheet of paper. There were blurred pictures of the children. I did not recognize myself but she assured me that I was there. Confronted with my name on a typed official list somehow confirmed for me, that my memories were real.

On the last day, as we prepared to leave, all the sisters came to say goodbye to me, my daughter Claudine and to my granddaughter, Hannah. The Mother Superior kissed us and wished us the best and told us we were welcome to stay with them any time. They would be praying for us.

Sister Marie Antoine, as she promised, gave me copies of the documents and pictures. Before we left, we sat down in the courtyard and talked about world problems. To my surprise, she was rather well-informed. She confided that she had a little radio and between prayers, she listened every day and night to the news of the world. After listening, she said, she prayed even harder. She was allowed the privilege of the radio because of her advanced age. Before leaving we persuaded the sisters to pose for a photo. They laughed like school girls, but finally stood quietly so we could take the picture.

My daughter and granddaughter were enchanted with the convent and the sisters. It was such a beautiful place, and it gave them a frame of reference for all the stories I had told them over the years. I hope they realize that good people actually existed in the midst of the war.

As for me, I remain indebted to the sisters. I keep all of these memories alive in my heart. And I am grateful. In my head I see Sister Marie-Antoine and how she would react to the news that her miracle had a son Josef. She would be dancing in the Convent telling everyone

that a third miracle had occurred.

Chapter Nineteen: Closure

My childhood was stolen. I grew up being on the alert for disaster to happen at any moment. I never had a moment in my life when I thought that things would remain stable. I had no roots. I did not see many of those I love, my father above all; grow old in the normal course of time. I felt like an errant soul, just floating around, with no center of gravity. I tried over the years to establish roots. It would always be very difficult for me. I always felt that I did not belong anywhere, that I was poised between two worlds.

All of the rituals of family life were torn apart. After the war, we tried to reconnect with those rituals. At least my mother tried, but without conviction. She could not give what was no longer within her. The war had turned her into an empty shell.

But somehow I grew up.

The separation from my parents meant there was no intimate relative to model one after. When I was reunited with my mother, she was immersed in her own depression and she would turn on me in frustration.

I arrived in the United States as an adult. I stopped trying to tell my story for a long time. I felt that people did not want to hear of the horrors that a young child had been subjected to.

We, the hidden children, kept a lid over our lives that we had endured. We did not talk about our experiences and we did not ask questions. Like the others, I kept my experiences locked up inside me.

While I was in the convent, there loomed the question of conversion to Catholicism. But I never felt actual pressure from the sisters. There were subtle attempts to influence children

under their care. I felt it myself without understanding it. I had to learn prayers and follow the convent rituals. Yet they gave me a lifeline to hang on to.

I recall a young girl of 18 taking her vows. I remember how much I longed to follow her example. I just wanted to belong.

After the war, I looked at the young girls, dressed in white organza dresses and tiaras, parading in the streets of Paris, on their way to their communion. I was so envious of them, but I did not tell my family. My brother had destroyed the precious beads given to me by Sister Andrea, the white rosary I kept hidden in my pocket so I could touch it at all times. I always knew that my brother did not want me to keep it. He said we were Jews and not Christians and I should get rid of it. But I loved it. It was the only gift I had from Sister Andrea and a precious remembrance of my time in the convent.

When I had to leave the convent and run for my life again, I was saved by the Cadusseau couple who put their lives on the line to hide a Jewish child. I will never forget all of those who with their good will and love for their fellow man helped all those they could to survive.

I will remember the good German who saved my mother and me from a transport to a concentration camp. I will remember the bus driver who held on to the package of silver my mother had entrusted with him and saved it for us.

But much more could have been done. Many more lives could have been saved. Those in the church had access to large institutions that had the capacity to protect more children. They were very aware of the realities of Nazism.

I am now an adult in the last stage of my life. I live in a house which I feel estranged from. It is minimal and bare, unfinished. It is barely comfortable. Perhaps I feel that it might be

taken away at a moment's notice. I am still always ready to flee. A strange noise in the street makes my heart pound. A suddenly blaring siren makes me run for my suitcase and my shoes so I can escape quickly.

Once I was on vacation with my daughter and my husband on Cape Cod. We had rented a bungalow in a summer colony in off-season and were the only family there. During the night, a loud siren woke us up. I panicked. I grabbed my child without taking the time to dress her or dress myself and ran out. I was sick with fear. My husband drove us to the little village a few miles away. It was quiet, without a soul around. The siren had stopped. We drove around for a while.

We returned to our bungalow, and I remained awake for the rest of the night. The next day, we were told that there had been a fire and the siren alerted the firemen. It took me a long time to calm down.

I still mourn for my father, but without any hope. It has become habitual. I know that it is only a dream. Even in a movie, I see an actor who resembles my father and I grieve.

I often think about my mother. She waited for her husband all her life until she died.

I miss the Sunday dinners when the family was all there.

I miss hearing the loud arguments flying around the table.

I miss my brother's pranks.

I miss my mother's stern reactions.

I miss my father's loving eyes and smiling lips.

I miss the pastry on the dinner plate.

I miss my Uncle Mietek showing me how to eat properly and finish my food. Look, he

said, this is how Zaede Yuman did it. Zaede was my uncle's grandfather. My uncle would stick his tongue out and lick his plate clean. I would follow his example despite my mother's disapproval.

The story became legend in my family. After the war, when we gathered around the table, the kids would do the Zaede Yuman lick. My daughters knew Uncle Mietek, and he taught her the lick. My granddaughter does it now, even though she never actually knew my uncle.

When I talk about my childhood now, it feels like climbing up a hill, filled with shadows falling away on each side of me, receding at a rapid speed I cannot control. I have no pictures of uncles and aunts, cousins, grandparents. They all flew up the Auschwitz chimney. And, of course, no graves. I have only memories and stories that were handed down in my family. Death happened in a no man's land without a marker, only a name on a list.

The theft of my childhood has never left me.

And I still live with the guilt: this nagging feeling that somehow I had done something wrong and was cast out. A child calls out when she needs help or is panicked. The hidden child was utterly alone, exposed to innumerable dangers.

I was afraid for many years afterwards that the genie inside would come out and engulf me, that a group of men in black boots and green uniforms would turn up and take me away.

The hidden children changed their personalities completely: a chatty child became silent, gazing at the world with distrust. They grew up chronically depressed and anxious. Those symptoms were diagnosed later, not at the time. Everyone wanted to forget.

And there is the incapacity for a hidden child to really love. We fear losing the object of our love again and we are always waiting for our fathers to come back. There is no trust, no

confidence, and ultimately, no hope. Every aspect of life has been shattered. I feel brittle, like a broken piece of glass. Everything is out of kilter; people do not feel right.

I was rooted in the earth like a flower with its petals closed. Even now, I cannot find a comprehensible reason as to why my childhood was stolen.

Those who survived, like me, do not engage in normal conversations. We are always struggling for sanity. We want to appear normal, but we are not.

The Vichy regime, installed by the Nazis with Laval at its head, encouraged the deportations of children under sixteen. Robert Brasillach, a collaborator and editor of *Je Suis Partout*, (“*I Am Everywhere*”) a fascist newspaper, wrote in September 1942 that “Families should be kept together and Jewish children deported with their parents. Above all, do not forget the little ones.” It was Brasillach who hid in an attic after the liberation of Paris. He joked in his diary, “Jews have been living in cupboards for four years. Why not imitate them?”

I cannot forget: the experience is always there inside my head and heart, a stone weighing me down. I can barely lift my head above the freezing water of memories lapping at my feet.

Remember all of you that which Amalek did to us: remember everything. Do not forget for the rest of your lives and pass it on as a holy testament to the coming generations that the Germans killed, slaughtered and murdered us.

- from the testament of Elkhanan Elkes, leader of the Kovno Jewish Council)